

Keeping Track of Us, Take 3

A Book Review

Sara Belser
Reba Place Fellowship

Communities Directory, Third Edition
(Fellowship for Intentional Communities, Rutledge MO, 2000) \$34.00.

The third edition of the *Communities Directory* includes groups familiar to us like Plow Creek Fellowship, Reba Place Fellowship and Community House of Cincinnati. Also included are Rat & Tat Familien-Gemeinschaft, which practices “farming with lost crops of the Incas,” and Kidstown, where “Folks into green-business creation will be assisted, as will children learning to be entrepreneurs.” Hmm. The subtitle of the 450-page manual is “A Guide to Intentional Communities and Cooperative Living.” It includes maps, charts, thirty-nine articles

about community living, and listings of resources as well as individual blurbs for hundreds of communities in North America and around the world.

Look through the cross-reference chart section and you will find all kinds of quick info, including how often each community eats together, how many children are home-schooled and the number of buildings in the community. The list of purposes for communities includes “relieve loneliness,” “earth peace spirit simplicity,” “Tropical Pagan Eco-Village,” “to live together cheaply,” “Osho’s Zorba the Buddha,” “Communitarian, Matriarchal, Polyfidelitous,” and “SOLD OUT FOR JESUS!” Glancing down the list of total populations, you will see a large variation, mostly from three to fifty, but a fair number larger than that, too. And then you will see “40,000.” Follow that column over to “Hutterian Brethren.” Oh yeah, the Hutterites. After them, the Inter-Cooperative Council of Ann Arbor Chicago



ties with Berkeley in holding second place for cities with the most communities. (You can see this and more geographical information in the map section.)

The most intriguing part of the *Directory* for me is the article section in the beginning, which examines various aspects of the “communities movement.” Anyone involved in community life will find a subject of interest, whether it be agriculture, cults, kibbutzes, mental handicaps, student co-ops, homosexuality, chemical sensitivities, old age, decision-making, or something else. This manual is written largely for people visiting communities, but anyone who picks it up will be drawn in by the testimonies it carries.

This directory could be a useful tool in connecting Christian groups, since many of those listed have described the teaching of Jesus as their motivation for community. Most of all, it will give us a greater sense of companionship in our communal journey to read about some of the other lighthouses who fight the night of individualism around us. Let us read with appreciation and solidarity the title of one of the articles, taken from a bumper sticker: “My Other Car Isn’t Mine Either.” Communitarians, unite! ©

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This Is Too Much—Or Is It?

Debbie Gish
Church of the Sojourners

When my mother, step-father and older sister were all hospitalized at the same time a while back, I stood back from my list of sorrows and proclaimed that this was too much. That became my new mantra: “This is too much.” But there was something else speaking to me in the back of my mind—a message that came a little less automatically, but somehow managed to ring true even in my sleepless nights. It was something that Jack Bernard here at Church of the Sojourners has been trying to say to our congregation over and over again: “These are not the times that we have to get through in order to have peace or tranquillity or happiness on the other side. This is what we have been given.”

The irony was that I wasn’t in the hospital. I wasn’t suffering the loss of control and freedom that my sister was in the psychiatric hospital. I wasn’t vomiting blood like my mother was. I wasn’t writhing in pain that even morphine couldn’t touch like my stepfather was. My pain was knowing my loved ones were hurting. But honestly, my pain was also selfish. My peace was disturbed. My sense of control was taken from me. My plans were altered.

Recently I reread the book *Compassion* by Henri Nouwen. It is an invitation for us to respond in kind to the compassion of our Lord. Much of what I share here comes from my reflections on



that book. Nouwen emphasizes that Jesus was an incarnation of compassion. Compassion is love incarnated in Jesus. God could have made himself into one of a variety of things. He could have chosen C. S. Lewis’ figure of a lion, a powerful, fear-inducing, authority-demanding beast. He could have chosen some awesome, terrifying, mythical-type creature like we see in Revelation. But God chose to be human; God chose to be with us; God chose to be one of us. Matthew 1:23 reads, “A virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall name him Emmanuel, which means ‘God with us.’” The Creator became the created. The totally *other* became totally *one of*. He came in obscurity, He came in humility and He came to be with us.

This is one of those indescribable concepts to me. I wish I had words to conjure some “aha” experience for all of us so that this would

seem more alive. But I honestly think that understanding or experiencing or believing deeply that God is a *God with us* gives us a vision to be individuals and a people who are compassionate.

The word compassion is derived from the Latin words *pati* and *cum* which together mean “to suffer with.” If God is a compassionate God, then He is a God who is truly with us and suffers with us. The interesting thing about Jesus’ suffering is that in all honesty it was more of a suffering “because of” us, than a suffering “with us.” He came to earth “because of” our rebellion; He was rejected “because of” our blindness; He was crucified “because of” our arrogance; He suffered on the cross “because of” our sin. These things are true, but Jesus in his compassion entered into our lives voluntarily. Philippians 2:5 reads, “let the same mind be in you that was in Christ Jesus, who

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Meeting Kingdom House from San Diego

A Light Shines in the Darkness

David Janzen
Reba Pace Fellowship

I got a phone call from someone who introduced himself as Brian Heep. He said he was part of a young intentional Christian community in San Diego and had been sent to Chicago by his employer in the hardware business to participate in the Home Show. But Brian was calling to arrange a visit to Reba Pace Fellowship. I invited him to the Monday evening Cana House potluck.

Brian discovered just how poor our hospitality can be. He arrived late and found no one to answer the front door. So he circled around the house and found us gathered around picnic tables in the back. The food was nearly gone, and then we didn't let him eat his poor pot-luck fare because we kept

asking him questions about his community.

Kingdom House Community is a household of about eight persons in San Diego, affiliated with a local Pentecostal congregation. They are an offshoot of another community in Kansas City by the same name. Their core commitments are to hospitality, nonviolence and simplicity. They have taken in a series of homeless men to help them get on their feet with employment and support for life-giving disciplines. Sources of inspiration for their particular calling to community have been Dorothy Day, Bonhoefer, Henri Nouwen, John Howard Yoder, and other Anabaptist writers. "Hey," we exclaimed, "that makes you cousins!"

Eventually Brian figured out that if he wanted to eat he would have to ask us questions about Reba. It was a great experience of fellowship to sit around the table as night fell, community members and guests alike contributing to the conversations about the gifts and struggles of community. We retold the story of God's grace in Reba's history, each one contributing the parts that we knew. A chord had been struck and a harmony was sung. Jesus was present among us.

As I walked Brian back to the El station,

I described how we at Reba are trying to save a few of these apartment buildings for low-income families while greedy developers are gobbling up and converting affordable housing all around us into pricey condos. We felt how small are our communities—one in Evanston and one in San Diego. Brian was going back to the Hilton and the mammoth hardware trade show at the McCormick center. In a world of giant corporations and homelessness, vast fortunes piled up while the poor are squeezed out of their homes, we felt like little candles in the vast darkness of the night.

At the same time I took heart. Here is another community we had known nothing about, where the hearts of a few young people have been set aflame by the love of Jesus. And another community is born with supernatural hope. We rejoiced to find ourselves in that long story which has outlived all empires and dominions. @

"All that came to be had life in Him and that life was the light of all people, A light that shines in the darkness, A light that darkness could not overcome."

John 1

A Summer Sojourn in San Francisco

Gabriela Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

I almost chose not to go to the Summer Sojourn hosted by the Church of the Sojourners (COS) in San Francisco. Two years ago I went to their high school Sojourn, so I knew that five weeks with COS would shake up my world. After all the changes that came with my freshman year at Baylor, I thought it would be really nice to just settle down and do the same old thing for the next three years of college. But I guess God wasn't ready to give me a break.

The Sojourn was a busy month. I'm only now realizing what a huge blessing it was... a blessing to learn what it means to be church every day, to live in a household, to serve in the neighborhood, and to begin

some great friendships with the eight other interns.

Work was good but... Regarding work, we spent four days a week serving in various jobs in the neighborhood. I cared for the children of staff at Grace Fellowship, participated in a prayer walk through the Mission District, and served fried chicken every Thursday afternoon at Glide Soup Kitchen. Some of the other interns worked at the hospital with AIDS and cancer patients, tutored, did construction, babysat, and worked alongside homeless youth in a cafe and thrift store. The work was good and sometimes challenging, not always fun. I felt very white at the soup kitchen, and I saw sides of homelessness that are usually hidden in Waco. The prayer walk was challenging for someone like me who doesn't come to prayer easily, but I learned new ways to mix prayer with the arts. I also came away from the prayer walks asking what Christ's resurrection means in our lives, what it means to be redeemed and healed here on earth. Caring for the children at Grace was definitely my "fun" job. We took lots of long walks and played at Dolores Park on sunny days, and I even watched Jacob take his first steps.

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A Fabulous Week

A time for us to band together and to find identity in the Kingdom of God

Sara Belser
Reba Pace Fellowship

The youth from Church of the Sojourners, Reba Pace Fellowship and Hope Fellowship headed to Plow Creek for a week of retreat before the August conference. It was fabulous. We worked, played around, hiked all over the place, talked a lot, and drove a little around town.

Hannah Zazvorka and Matt and Ian Creeger were there from Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco. Gabriela and Anali Gatlin came from Waco with Dan Piche and Nancy Gatlin, who helped out for part of the week—all from Hope Fellowship. Betsy Belser, Tikva Frantz, Bekka Youngquist and I were there from Reba Pace Fellowship. And from Plow Creek Fellowship we were joined by Megan Reha, Jon Foss, Joshua and Micah Dean and Helena Graham.

Our first opportunity to build relationships: The Sojourners and Hope folks already knew each other pretty well, as did Reba and Plow Creek youth, but this was our first opportunity to build relationships between these two groups. The bonding went beautifully with a lot of mutual respect among the youth, in my opinion. We led

ourselves. This was sign of how deeply community life has affected us that we would have the maturity to do that and the humility to do it together. The retreat was similar to the Summer Sojourn in that group decision-making happened quickly and naturally. Everyone seemed to understand how their needs and wants fit into those of the group. I was happy to be with everyone and we want to do it again next summer.

Our gracious host at Plow Creek was Louise Stahnke, who prepared meals for us to cook and arranged our lodging. Jim Fitz, Steve Graham and Richard Friesen led us out to weed strawberries a couple of times. Rick Reha organized some work for us around the community including staining the Foss's house a darker shade of brown. Tim Gale helped us make shish kabobs for dinner and took us tubing down Bureau Creek. In many respects, Plow Creek was a perfect place for the gathering because it has so much space in which to roam and yet we could be centralized at the Common Building. We had a peaceful setting—free to do our own thing and be spontaneous. We got to see a few members of the Plow Creek community but we would have liked to get to know them better while we were there.

The list of most important details: One highlight of the week was celebrating Bekka's birthday on Tuesday, August 1. We had cake and wore colorful sunglasses after a sunset hayride led by Josh. Some of us had a good time jumping off a dead tree into Bureau Creek on the tubing ride. We gave Jonny Foss a mohawk, which he soon shaved off. The fireflies were a new sight for some Californians. An episode of sleep-talking occurred (we won't tell you who it was). Betsy put her foot out of commission, and had to be carried around during

the later part of the week, which was an unfortunate incident. A couple of us were negatively affected by the heat and humidity. We were completely victorious over poison ivy, which we saw scattered around the property on our hike through the brush. And that sums up the list of most important details from our experience together.

A chance to talk about our community experience: Those of us

who wanted it got a chance to talk at one of our campfires about what community has meant in our lives. Our conversation lingered on the subject of crises and hard times in community and how they shaped our view of and decisions about Christian intentional community.

Some of us are pretty disenchanted with the whole idea and weren't afraid to say it. It was quite encouraging for us, though, to brush up against youth who had a positive attitude toward community in general and to find out that there are places where community is happening in a constructive, positive way worth giving one's life to. The rest of us were able to recognize that although we may not be able to find meaning in the pain of the recent past, God is working in us for good. We were all encouraged to think that God uses the struggle to mature us, that we are not alone in any feeling we may have as youth toward Christian intentional community.

If Christian intentional community is going to continue into the generations to come, someone will need to carry the vision.

Building these relationships between community youth is very important not only for encouraging one another in our present situations but beyond the present to the future. If Christian intentional community is going to continue into the generations to come, someone will need to carry the vision. My experience has been that the youth were not expected to carry the vision, so little effort was put into raising them up to do that. But now things are changing at Reba and people are moving toward asking, "If we don't raise up our youth, who will?" The youth need all the love and care they can get if they are going to be loving and caring for each other seriously in the future. I say, who better to take the mission of loving our youth seriously now than Christian intentional community?

This retreat was a time for us to band together and find identity in the kingdom of God. We got a tiny taste of doing community ourselves. Thank you all from my heart for supporting that and giving us the chance. @



SMC Youth at Plow Creek



Anne Gavitt

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now, circumstances that we have to change, our exhaustion is deeper, our desperation to take care of ourselves is more acute, and our joy is squelched.

Nouwen suggests that patience is the discipline of compassion. For most of us, patience immediately conjures up an image of waiting. "Just be patient," we say. Being asked to wait means something is not in our power to control. A traffic jam, a long line, for Christmas to come, to get pregnant. If something is under or in our control, we do not need to be patient. Again, the root word for compassion in Latin is "pati" or suffer. "Pati" is also the root word for patience. Compassion can be interpreted as com-patience. Therefore it would be fair to say that being patient is another way to suffer with, to be compassionate.

Impatience is grounded in clock time when we can't wait for something to end or begin. But patience is grounded in kairos time, where every moment is opportune. We have all had those moments of watching a beautiful sunset, enjoying a great meal, or of being in love with someone, and time

› **Homosexuality** cont from p.5

man. He was promptly included in a household, and made to feel part of a family. It became obvious to him that people had arranged their lives, often at considerable cost, to love him well. Some offered the gift of encouragement, others of friendship, still others exercised their gifts of teaching, preaching, and pastoring. In the end, as the (mostly) grateful recipient of such love and care, he decided to join Sojourners with the hope of extending to others the same love he had experienced.

Cross: Before joining Sojourners, both homosexual members of Sojourners struggled long and hard to try and change their sexual orientation. One fasted and prayed on Sundays while participating in an "ex-gay" ministry. The other went to Christian counseling for nearly ten years seeking to change his orientation.

While surveying the book of Mark, Richard Hays points out an "enacted parable." In Mark 8, Jesus touches the blind man's eyes, but the blind man sees only partially. Jesus touches his eyes again, and then the man sees clearly. Up until this time Jesus has shown the disciples many signs and miracles. The disciples have seen partially who Jesus is. After healing the blind man, Jesus

stands still. The moment is precious and savored. I have always called those times "eternal moments." It is easy to remain alive and aware in those moments. But the challenge comes in the difficult times, to stop looking at clock time and live in kairos time. The same word in Greek that is translated in the New Testament as patience is also translated endurance, perseverance and fortitude. These are all strong words, muscle words. They are hard-working words. Patience is sometimes thought of as a passive word, but if you envision it as endurance or perseverance, it adds meat to it.

Paul says in Romans 5, "We boast in our hope of sharing the glory of God, but not only that. We also boast in our sufferings knowing that suffering produces endurance (which can be translated patience), and endurance produces character and character produces hope, and hope does not disappoint us because God's love has been poured into our hearts through the Holy Spirit that has been given us." Suffering, endurance, character, hope. Most of us would like the list to exclude suffering. We all want the three: endurance, character, and hope. But we need to see the connection with suffering

explains that to follow him also involves taking up a cross. As the disciples see this, they see clearly. Jesus' enacted parable highlights this crucial, clearer sight.

At first, both homosexuals expected the sign-miracle from Jesus of changing their sexual orientation. But, since that has not happened, they came to see that following Jesus in regard to their sexuality might mean picking up the cross.

Of course, picking up a cross is not unique to them. For one Sojourner member it meant dying to herself in regard to the approval of her family; for another member, it meant dying to himself in relation to a rewarding job that demanded that he relocate, for others it means living a celibate life as singles. The homosexual members of Sojourners find themselves surrounded by people who know something about cross-bearing. Sojourner members have empathy and few pre-packaged superficial "solutions" for homosexuals because they participate in a church community in which cross-bearing is part of the deal for everyone.

New Creation: But what of the hope for a new creation? If new creation doesn't necessarily mean a change of sexual orientation, what does it mean? Richard Hays argues that the NRSV translates I Corinthians 5:17 correctly. "So if anyone is in Christ,

that allows the others to have strength and power.

"I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the sharing of his suffering by becoming like him in his death if somehow I may obtain the resurrection of the dead." The powerful hope of the resurrection and the love labor of the cross—these are our tools and this is our task. Again I want to say, these are not the things that we have to get through in order to find peace or tranquillity or happiness on the other side. This is what we've been given. God is here. This is the task before us. This is the love labor of the cross. The hope of the resurrection is present and is accessible. Let us re-write our story as individuals and as churches. Let us enter in and see what is happening in kairos time. I believe we will be joyfully surprised. ☺

This sermon was given to our congregation in May 2000 during a particularly difficult time in my life. I hope this in an encouragement to others who struggle to live faithfully in the context of their particular part of the Body of Christ.

there is a new creation..." That is, it is not so much that we are each personally transformed in the ways we would like, as much as we are part of a new creation.

Christianity is not the ultimate self-help program. New creation doesn't necessarily mean that a person achieves an ideal body weight, sheds all temptations, manages to keep all New Year's resolutions, or changes sexual orientation. More probable, being part of a new creation means that we find ourselves part of a people in which the poor in spirit are blessed, God's strength is revealed in our weakness, Samaritans become some of our best neighbors, and that queer people of all kinds are not only invited to the feast, but are the most likely to respond. New creation has less to do with finally attaining our ideal self-image than it does with coming into a loving unity with God and each other. Our experience at Sojourners is that community, at its best, gathers us toward that loving unity.

After I talked about Sojourners' experience with homosexual members, people continued to share experiences and raise questions. I think we all felt that we had only just begun the discussion. But I also left with the sense that all of us, as we work out church community, are offering an important and faithful response. ☺

Shalom Connections

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Summer Sojourn Participants (l to r): Sara Belser, Tatyana Timshina, Philip Saleh, Karen Zemlicka, Gabriela Gatlin, Michelle Somers, Steven Braney (front), Jo Saba, Jaime Zazvorka, Matt Creeger.

› **Summer Sojourn** cont from p.2

Household living—the best part: So work was good, but the best part of the Sojourn for me was living in a household with Jeff, Laura and Naomi, Louise, Sara and Luke, and Sara Belser. At the risk of sounding overly dramatic, it filled me with awe to see their conflicts and to recognize how different they are from each other, yet to watch them live out of love for each other and work towards unity. They taught me that making a new family in God is a higher calling than flaunting your personal habits or cultural background or theological beliefs. I love household living for that big picture, but also for the simple things like eating together and hearing all the different stories at the dinner table, for playing Burp, for having Louise teach me how to make Belizean tortillas, for watching Naomi cut her first tooth and learn to walk, for dancing salsa in the kitchen with Sara B., for eating Oreos and writing postcards on a household night.

We learned to bracket the debates and get on with loving each other.

One of the most important lessons we interns learned was modeled in our households and by the church at large. We learned that unity of the body of Christ should come

before our own rights and beliefs. There were simple ways that we worked towards unity, such as deciding what to do as a group in our free time. We also had tons of debates on everything from dating, homosexuality, and the role of women in the church to different methods of providing emergency housing. We disagreed on everything, sometimes with anger and judgment, but we learned to bracket the debates and get on with loving each other. Five weeks wasn't enough time to take away my self-righteousness, but I began to understand how God's love is so much bigger than what I feel or believe about a certain issue.

Interpreting our own history to proclaim God's goodness: Jack gave a teaching on the last Sunday that has also challenged me. He said that just like the writers of the Old Testament, we need to interpret our own history to proclaim God's goodness. I'm encouraged to look at my life with different eyes because sometimes it's so easy to feel desperate or to think that God has forgotten me, but the real truth lies in God's great love and his goodness.

So I come away from the Sojourn feeling renewed in my faith and my love for God, encouraged to pray and read scripture, and grateful for some deep friendships. At the same time, I'm also struggling to pursue my education which is valuable while trying to understand what this calling to be church (and maybe live in community) should mean in my life. I don't have answers, but questions are a good start. For that I thank Church of the Sojourners. ☺

› **This Is Too Much** cont from p.1

though He was in the form of God did not regard equality with God as something to be exploited but emptied himself, taking the form of a slave, being born in human likeness. And being found in human form, He humbled himself and became obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross." The verbs here are "emptied himself," "humbled himself," "became obedient." These are verbs of action and choice. These aren't words of blame. He could have said, "This is your fault, people of Israel." But instead He says, "This is for you, people of Israel." A heart of compassion re-writes the story, in order to enter into the pain, even the pain that is caused by sin, for the sake of the loved one, for the sake of the other.

Another striking thing about this passage in Philippians is that it says "being found in human form." It feels like Jesus suddenly looked down at his own body and said, "Wow! I'm human!" He just found himself in human form. Another way to put might be, "being found in the circumstance of being human, Jesus decided to humble himself," or "being found in a humble state, He humbled himself." For us it could be asking ourselves what are the circumstances, what is the state we find ourselves in? Then, what do we decide to do? Is it a difficult job, is it a difficult relationship, is it depression, is it the problems or the structures in the church? Nouwen says our natural tendency is fight or flight. What would happen if we entered in? If "being found in this difficult situation, I *blank*..." Humbled myself, entered into the pain, thanked God for the opportunity to love, thank God for the opportunity to suffer with? There are many ways we can look at our circumstances and enter into them fully.

When we see ourselves as suffering "because of" a particular person, institution or circumstance, resentment, anger, jealousy, despair are close by waiting to bite us, waiting to consume us. They become the suffering instead of the original thing that was causing the pain in the first place. But when we choose to suffer with, even if the suffering is not our choice, we are entering into the very heart of God. The problem or the pain or the difficult task is no longer something in the way of our peace, in the way of our happiness, in the way of our good day. It becomes the very task we are given to do. If these tasks are thought of as burdens to be rid of, problems to be fixed

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Listening to the Lord in Community

An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Why it is important: In an individualistic age like ours, one purpose of Christian community is to give us all (new members and elders alike) an ongoing experience of character formation that makes us capable of living together as a people—the people of God.

The spirit of our age holds that it is nearly impossible to find fulfillment and to be committed at the same time. In our age a life of personal joy within faithful long-term relationships is a miracle. By making personal salvation the focus of the Good News, the church has bought into our culture's individualism and greatly diminished the Bible's power.

The Bible is not primarily about salvation for individuals. We are not at the center of the story. The Bible is more concerned with the "why" of salvation, which is to form a people, a community, who will reflect God's love and justice in the world. In this setting, persons discover the purpose of their creation by belonging to a people called together by their creator. Intimacy and fulfillment meet. Justice finds a concrete social expression powered by love from God.

Stanley Hauerwas has coined the useful term, "a community of character." We are privileged to stand "as a political alternative to every nation, witnessing to the kind of social life possible for those that have been formed by the story of Christ." In this editorial I want to encourage us to faithfulness in one discipline of that alternative community—listening to the Lord.

Bird watchers be still: This spiritual discipline seems to me a lot like bird watching. The discipline is to know how to wait with heightened attention, and to be still. Our discipline will not cause the birds to appear. Like God, birds are wild and free, and it is their freedom that determines what we will see. It is exactly their freedom to

not do our bidding that makes our encounters with them so surprising, grace-filled and renewing. In the spiritual life, nothing depends on our grit or cleverness. There is no spiritual technique that makes God do our bidding. Everything depends on the actual fulfillment of Jesus' words, "Lo, I am with you always, to the end of the age." (Matthew 28:20) If this is not true, we are lost.

In human community there is a pull toward the lowest common denominator where we all want to be parasites of the group—drawing our strength and nourishment from one another and from the leaders. On our own we cannot persist in wanting to be good. We want to become judges, to give back what we have received.

In order for community to be a life-giving place for wounded and wounding people like ourselves, each one needs a direct connection to the source of our life. We all need to be birdwatchers in the spirit. When each one of us has a living relationship, an authentic conversation with God, then we are lifted by the joys of community and not dismayed by its failures. Then every real conversation feeds us, no matter the sorrow that is talked about.

Are you listening? Years ago at Reba, Jim Stringham wrote a brochure named "God Wants to Speak to You: Are You Listening?" In it he recommends the discipline of listening to Jesus with paper and pen in hand, to give attention to what we hear. I am sustained by the way Jesus has been faithful to wait for me in this circle of quiet. I am sustained by the knowledge that others are doing this too, and so we are one body. We test what we have heard with each other and are guided in a common path.

I have noticed how the same habit of attention to "Jesus within" sharpens my attention to hear the voice of Jesus within my sister and brother, and within the worship of community gathered. Surprisingly, this habit of attention takes me to the place where I am most myself, and most like every other human made in God's image. It is through Jesus that we have community with each other.

Soul noise: I want to conclude this editorial with a page out of my journal from a day of retreat that Joanne and I shared at Plow Creek Fellowship. This is not a poem. It is just what happened in a quiet hour.

prostitutes. During my time here, the Lord has made it clear to me that this would be another step toward maturity for me. I am certain to face criticism, but the Lord assures me, "I will empower you and give you the words. Just obey me."

Thank you for this opportunity to testify to the marvelous acts of God. Glory and praise be to Him for ever. It has been His good pleasure to make me his co-worker, though I am the least (Ephesians 3:8), and thanks also to all of you for the love and care you have given me. The laborers are few and furthermore, the enemy is watching to see who he can devour. Please hold me in your prayers. ¡Gracias!



From Waco to Veracruz and Back

J.B. Smith
Hope Fellowship

When Norma Gutierrez first came to the United States 10 years ago, she wasn't seeking a better life. She came to dance.

She arrived in Waco, Texas, on May 31, 1990, on a tour with a Ballet Folklorico troupe from Monterrey, Mexico.

It was just a vacation for Norma. The 23-year-old daughter of a construction contractor, she was the oldest of with six children and worked as a nurse back in her hometown. She had no desire to leave her close-knit circle of family, church and friends.

"I didn't really know too much about the United States," she said. "It was just exciting to be on a trip."

Then she met Javier.

Javier Torres was thin 27-year-old from Xalapa, Veracruz, who spoke little English and did little but work. His two jobs kept him busy from 11 p.m. to 3 p.m. He rented a house with friends, saved his money and rarely went out to socialize.

But that spring night, he had agreed to volunteer at a Hispanic festival, and it was there he met Norma. A street dance was going on and she took his hand.

"There was something about the way she treated me," Javier recalls. "It was the way she held my hand, gentle but strong."

For three hours they talked, and before her bus left that night for Monterrey, he got

her phone number.

They were set on the path that would soon lead them to marry and raise a family in the United States, far from the comfort of kith and kin. Together in a strange land, the Torres would seek a place to belong, and they would find their place at Hope Fellowship.

It didn't take long for Norma and Javier to realize they were right for each other. In the first two months after they met, they stayed in touch by phone, and Javier ran up a \$1,500 phone bill.

"We decided to meet one more time," Javier recalls. "I told her, 'I'm coming to Monterrey in July, and if I come, I'm going to ask you to marry me.' She said, 'OK.'"

Soon after he arrived in Monterrey, he proposed, she accepted and they announced their plans to Norma's stunned family. The two married Dec. 13, 1991, having spent a total of 15 hours together.

Javier moved to Monterrey and got a comfortable job in computers. But with the Mexican economic crisis of 1994, his earning power tumbled, and he knew he would have to go north again to pay off the credit card bills and car payments. He could make more money cleaning floors at Wal-Mart in Waco.

It was meant to be a temporary move, but in December 1995, Norma joined Javier in Waco with their young daughter, Aranza, and they embarked on a new life in the United States.

Norma said adjusting to life here was not easy. Raised a devout Catholic, she attended a Catholic church in Waco but didn't find the intimate community she was seeking. Meanwhile, she said she said other Mexican immigrants seemed to have set aside the values of community in favor of getting ahead.

"When I arrived here and saw how people with the same culture as me lived, it was sad," she said. "I didn't see much friendship in the Hispanic community. I saw how kids were left alone after school. It seemed like their parents were just

making money and didn't care about their kids. I thought, does it have to be like this for everybody?"

Norma discovered Hope Fellowship after she met member Nancy Gatlin at a World Hunger Farm event in Waco. She hooked up with the church's Spanish-language Bible study and then began going to the church's bilingual services. She said she found a closer walk with God and the fellowship she had been seeking.

"Now I can really be myself," she said. "You don't have to dress up, and you don't have to worry about how you look."

Javier, who had never been a regular churchgoer, was reluctant at first to get involved at Hope. But he went through the church's classes and became a member, and through contacts at Hope, he also became a board member at Habitat for Humanity.

He said going to Hope Fellowship has brought him closer to God and taught him to see that faith comes from love, not fear.

"The way they get you involved without preaching is refreshing," he said. "The most important thing is how they love the children and how they take care of each other."

Norma and Javier said they're glad to know that their daughters, Aranza, 7, and Miranda, 2, are growing up in a caring environment.

"It's like a family," Javier said. "When you are happy, they are happy; when you're sad, they're sad with you." ☺



Javier and Norma Torres, with their daughters



Mari Paz Aillón (left) and Ruth Anne Friesen

The way my mother treated me differently than the boys created in me a rebellious spirit. At age fifteen, I dropped out of school, left home and went to work as a live-in housekeeper. Two years later, when the family I was working for moved to Madrid, I went with them. On weekends, I was free to do whatever I wanted, which was to please the boys so they would like me. I found myself getting into the same rut as my mother, not being able to say no. I saw ads for “American bars” and spent time drinking with men to earn half the price of their drink.

When I was out of work, I was too proud to return home a failure and turned to prostitution to tide me over. I drank, smoked, tried hashish and cocaine. By my twentieth year, I was sick of it all. Men had disappointed me. I was confusing the love I desired with sex.

I started looking for answers. What should I do? Where was I going? I turned to such things as astrology and divination with cards. For me, God did not exist, and the church as I had experienced it as a child was not authentic.

After five years of doing whatever I pleased, I met a young man who seemed to be different than the others, and we got married. We were happy initially, but soon I felt it was harder to talk with him. A year later, I began to feel sick. I secretly went and had myself tested for AIDS. The tests came back positive. When I confided the results to my husband, he was immediately angry

with me, rejected me and we were separated. I wanted to die.

When I was at the end of myself, God suddenly was there. My strength had always been to work hard and make it on my own in what I did. But here I was in a situation where nobody, not even I myself, could do anything. I hoped that if there was Some Being out there, he would help me. Not knowing that you could actually go out and buy a Bible, I considered going to a priest and asking to *borrow* a Bible to read.

Then I met a gypsy who said that he had a cousin who went to church. Rafael invited me to church. From the moment I set foot in church and heard the praises, I knew in my heart that I had found what I had been searching for.

The Lord was good to me in spite of setbacks. I got housekeeping jobs, but kept losing them. My employers would wonder why I had to go to the doctor so often. I would be candid with them and then would be out on the street, only to get a better job.

At the point of death—surrender: I had been quite ill with tuberculosis brought on by the AIDS. The TB treatment brought me back to health in a year, and I returned to my family in with the idea of convincing them about the Lord. I thought I was the Holy Spirit! I was legalistic with them, and they rejected me. My brother said, “They’ve brainwashed you!”

I was very discouraged by their reaction. I stopped taking care of myself. I came down with a strange fever and, due to an irritation

in my throat, I wasn’t eating well. The doctors couldn’t figure it out, but finally in the third week of my illness they began to give me TB medications. My body responded to the treatment, but by that time I was so tired of life and my problems, I just wanted to go. Nobody expected me to pull out of it. I wanted to leave a note saying I wanted my pastor to make my funeral a joyous celebration rather than allowing my family have a priest lead something sad.

Then I surrendered to God. “Do what *You* want with me, Lord,” I told him.

I began an astonishing recovery. “Lord, you have given me a new life,” I told Him. “I offer it back to you.” I had no other interest than to please God, to give all for His service and nothing in my own interest. And God confirmed this attitude with a prophecy to me, saying that He was delighted with my desire to please him.

God allowed this disease so that I could come to know that I can’t do everything by myself, and that I need to trust in Him. That is the lesson that I have had to learn over and over in my life. Once he spoke to me with the words he said about Lazarus in John 11:4. “This illness does not lead to death; rather it is for God’s glory, so that the Son of God may be glorified through it.”

What I’m learning at Plow Creek: José Gallardo suggested that I come to Plow Creek to improve my English, which I had studied for three years, and also take a break from my responsibilities and evaluate spiritually what the Lord had done in me up to now. I have discovered here that there are people who work more strenuously for the Lord than I do! I have been able to achieve a balance between work on the farm and rest—something which is difficult for me. I have felt quite at home here. In Spain I loved to grab the microphone and emcee at our local coffee house, making sure everyone is having a great time. But here I have learned from Rich and Sarah Foss the benefits of silence. When they are quiet at meal times, I no longer feel responsible to break the silence.

Africa my goal: My long term goal and the desire of my heart is to go to Benin and work with a children’s home, caring for and teaching kids. I see next year as a preparation for going to Africa and working with the Mennonites’ project there. I need to learn some French, and I’m certain that the Lord has other changes to make in me as well. Meanwhile, I have been invited by churches in Spain to work on a joint venture they are starting, working with needy women, mostly

“Quiet yourself, David,
and listen to the noise of your own soul.”

Noise is what I’ve got:
ears buzzing,
crows calling,
Joanne stirring,
my own breath breathing,
is this meditation or distraction?

Pen scratching on paper,
heart thumping,
legs aching,
chair pushing against me,
the gravity of a billion galaxies on this point,
a universe held in being by Your loving attention.

An itch on my wrist,
Amos barking in the woods,
my soul relaxing,
spirit resting and trusting You more,
all my work worries receding,
my habitual resistance to You fading,
floating in your love and acceptance.

Joanne spreading out the crimson fall leaves she picked on our walk,
recalling the joyful time we had here at Plow Creek four weeks ago with our grandchildren,
replaying the games Esther Graham led us in last evening after the Plow Creek potluck,
gratitude and joy to be led by a teenager so at peace with adults.

Day-dreaming about Michael Jordan’s buzzer-beating heroics,
deep breaths return me to the center,
the Confuser trying to make me feel guilty for having day dreams and wandering thoughts,
remembering how good it feels to be alive in my body that still can play a little basketball
with Jon Foss.

Recalling the dentist drilling in my tooth yesterday,
how I hate to have my mouth open so long without permission to swallow,
wondering how it will be at my last breath, God,
getting a little drowsy as the stress of Evanston city life falls away,
bliss oozing into my consciousness from behind my field of vision,
am I moving toward enlightenment or sleep?

Making an effort to stay in attentive awareness,
a footstool pressing painfully against my arches,
a song sings itself in my heart
Jesus how I love you
Master how I need you,
Father how I bless you,
Sinner that I am,
a song of longing for you, Jesus, at once painful far and near.

Your love sustains us in community, sinners all,
disciples who can’t stay awake,
resting in you right now is all I can do. ☺



Homosexuality and Community

Tim Otto
Church of the Sojourners

Even accounting for its seven syllables, “homosexuality” sometimes seems unaccountably difficult to say, and hard to talk about. I was therefore somewhat surprised to find over twenty people seated and waiting to talk about homosexuality and community at the Shalom Connections Conference workshop. We started by listening to each person tell why he or she was attending. Almost everyone knew someone—a daughter, an uncle, a fellow seminarian, a best friend—who made the topic of homosexuality personal. A common question seemed to underlie most everyone’s comments: “How do I respond to that person faithfully?”

Richard Hays in his book, *The Moral Vision of the New Testament*, focuses one possible response through the images of community, cross, and new creation. Hays argues that these three major themes characterize the “moral vision” of the New Testament and therefore serve as good guides when contemplating a response to an ethical question. Using Hays’ images, I attempted to tell the story of how one church community, the Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, has attempted to live faithfully with homosexual members as part of its congregation.

Community: Ten years ago, a young man came seeking membership at the Church of the Sojourners. He said something like, “I’m a Christian, and I’m homosexual. Although I’ve tried to change my orientation, I doubt being homosexual is going to change, and I hope that being a Christian doesn’t. This is something I’d like to work out together with your help.” The church took the invitation to “work it out” together seriously. An initial step was to decide together whether Sojourners would bless same sex unions. After much painful, agonizing struggle, everyone concluded that the answer was no. But that was not the end of “working it out.”

The church had concluded that if the young man were to stay at Sojourners, he would need to live a celibate, single life. At the same time, everyone shared the concern that, “It is not good that the man should be alone.” Here Sojourners saw an opportunity that it was uniquely equipped for: to be together with, family to, and pilgrims alongside, this young

› Homosexuality cont on p.14

“The Living Word Creates a People”

Theme of Dialogue with Richard Hays at August Shalom Connections Conference

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

About 130 people from twenty communities came together for a weekend of inspiration, fellowship and hilarity—renewing our bonds with each other as intentional Christian communities with a shared history of growing relationship. Richard Hays, professor of Christian Ethics at Duke University Divinity School, engaged our questions with a series of teachings from the epistle of I Corinthians.

There is no way to summarize the fruits of this gathering. We can only offer a sampler as a way to remember and give thanks for those of us who were there. We also want to include those who could not come with some snapshots and reports from a couple of workshops. We can only wish we could convey the warmth of friendships renewed and the belly laughs from an outrageous “Lack of Talent Show.”



During a break (l to r): Richard Hays, John Alexander, Art Gish



Reba Place stages their own musical production during the (Lack of) Talent Show.

Richard Hays’ service to the communities gathered was uniquely fitting. He is a professor of Christian Ethics at Duke University Divinity School. He served us with the depth and breadth of his scholarship. But even more, the presence of Richard and Judy Hays conveyed a blessing and encouragement to our communities because they are, in many ways “two of us” having lived in community and knowing our calling from the inside out. Perhaps this blessing can come to you again in a few excerpts that follow:

“The truth is that whatever I have done as a New Testament scholar or teacher of the Bible has been, in many ways, indebted to the vision of community that started for us in those years when we lived at Metanoia Fel-

lowship [in the early 70’s] and were deeply shaped by the influence of Reba Place. So it is very moving for us to be back here this weekend.”

“In I Corinthians, Paul is trying mightily to bring about a conversion of the imagination of his readers. He wants to reshape how they imagine the world. This is necessary for them to become the people God intends.”

“Our task is not to recreate the New Testament Church. [They had all the problems we have.] But to learn from it by attending closely to the way God was at work in the lives of this community in Corinth to transform and reshape them. Paul’s fundamental conviction is that the church is a body of people claiming... to live within a new sphere of power.”

“In our society, the dominant problem is hedonism—the belief that we are entitled to get for ourselves all the goods we can get. We have a deep sense of entitlement... Paul calls, not only the Corinthians, but us, to recognize, “You are not your own. You were bought with a price.” Our self-constructed world is ended. We are members of Christ and of one another. Our calling is to glorify God in our bodies... This means, above all else, that we look to scripture and learn to read it as our story, learn to see ourselves in that story as the people of Exodus and promise.”

“We read the Bible in community and we see that God’s will is to create a people, not just to save individual souls.”

“Authentic evangelism has to be an invitation to join a community where these practices of discipleship are not only normative, but liberating.”



Carol Steiner with granddaughter Kristen Steiner

that pain?”

“Jesus helped me through the life of the Fellowship,” she asserts. “Love was here, which I hadn’t found before. This was a place where I could be honest about who I was and that was OK. It was a contrast to everything I had growing up. Here, people trusted me and cared about me. And when they hurt me, I knew it wasn’t coming from somewhere malicious. But I’m still learning how to let Jesus be with me in the pain.”

God’s love came through a new family: “How does God communicate love to you?” I ask.

“One important way was marrying Albert and having Karen. Albert prays for me, listens to me, and just loves me. Well, not just. We’ve been married thirty-four years.

“The thing that challenged me the most was trying to break the patterns of the generations that came through my own family. RPF women were my mentors. In some ways I succeeded; in some ways I failed.” It’s interesting that while her immediate family was where Carol experienced the most pain as a child, as an adult she points to her husband and child as the main ways God shows his love for her. In that I see the sign of a life being redeemed.

Carol’s strong love for God is quite evident in the ministries she carries: facilitating our Reba Prayer Chain and copying tapes for others as she listens to the meetings and times of worship she had to miss. “Intercession is a way to get beyond myself. I have contact with the people I pray for. And I think the Lord draws on my own pain and

struggles. When I open my heart and mind, He often touches things in my own life that challenge me. When the Spirit leads in this way, I can really pray from my heart.”

“I do face anxiety and fear—daily,” Carol admits. “My hardest struggle with the environmental illness has been letting go of my hopes and dreams. I am just moving to the fun part of life as a grandmother, but visiting my granddaughter is extremely difficult. I love to make things for her, but I don’t have the energy, and it’s hard to

find materials I can tolerate. I had always hoped we could go somewhere in mission with the Mennonite Central Committee after the family was raised. I envisioned my time spent in the church and the community. Instead my energies have gone toward learning how to deal with my illness. I can’t get out much. What I miss the most is worshipping with people and the Lord’s supper. I miss receiving it from someone and giving it to someone. I feel out of touch with RPF. We used to groan at having to have meetings. Now I miss them, miss talking with people and participating.”

How did Carol begin to get beyond these tragic losses and find a way to maintain the purity of heart that shines clearly through her character? “I stopped hoping for a ‘normal’ life. The Lord wants me to be free to live in the moment, whatever my circumstances.” My mind is triggered by that sentence. That’s one of the things God is teaching me right now, too—not to wish for control over my circumstances, but to approach them with the security I have in knowing He loves me.

A life in seclusion mirrors God’s work in the Fellowship: Many of Carol’s dreams have been shoved aside in favor of a survival mode, similar to what seems to have happened in the whole Fellowship. I am surprised at how Carol’s life in seclusion mirrors the spiritual work of God in the body from which she is, to a large extent, cut off. But God’s work doesn’t depend on meetings or conversations, come to think of it. God’s work starts in a different dimension

and shows up locally, spontaneously, miraculously. He works in his entire church and, though it is extremely fragmented, he forms something called “the people of God.”

“Sometimes I get so tired I hurt,” Carol admits, “and I ask, ‘How can I do this, Lord?’ Then I am given energy for the task I’m facing—but the energy goes away as soon as I finish. He’s saying, “Trust me, Carol.”

As Carol says that, I think of the situations here where I have no realistic hope for something God seems to want to do in us. That’s when the Fellowship, like a huge tent collapsed by heaviness and tragedy, shifts to reveal an open doorway. Then I realize why people are always talking about living by grace alone. The tragedy in Carol’s life is teaching her to trust beyond tragedy. May the beauty of your trust and mine become as precious and as evident as hers.

“The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; thy steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of thy hands.” Psalm 138:8



Lord, You Gave Me My Life: Mari Paz Aillón

Interview in Spanish by Richard Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

Hi! My name is Mari Paz Aillón. I have been visiting Plow Creek over the summer, and write this to introduce myself to you.

Family, childhood and a rebellious spirit: I felt loved by my parents. I was the only surviving girl in the family. But everyone, even my mother, was raised on ideas of “machismo.” This meant that if there was a girl in the family, her lot was to work. My three older brothers would have been quite capable of doing the work that my mother loaded onto me, but instead they were free to do whatever they chose.

Though my father supported the family well and took care of our needs, he drank and basically was an absent parent. His pattern was to go from work to the bar, and when he arrived home, he went right to bed. He didn’t spend time with us kids. He had no authority over us, and we didn’t take what he said seriously. Nor did Mother discipline us. My brothers soon took the path into delinquency, drugs, the reformatory and loose living.

Getting Acquainted

“My name is Lilian Martínez”

Interview in Spanish by Debbie Gish
Church of the Sojourners

My name is Lilian Martínez. I am from El Salvador. I am thirty-seven years old. When I was nineteen years old I came to the United States. My family was here, and I hoped to find work. I was scared when I got here. I didn't know anyone, and I didn't know the language. When I arrived on the airplane, I got lost in the airport and couldn't find my parents. I was with my little sister, who was only a year and a half old. We wandered around until finally my mother found us. I was very relieved.

When I got to San Francisco, I lived with my family. It became difficult for me. It would be a very long story if I were to tell it all. Through another church that I was attending near my house, I got to know people from Church of the Sojourners. During a very difficult time in my life, I left my family's home and came to live at Church of the Sojourners. This was ten years ago now.

It was very difficult for me to find work. I didn't speak English, and it has been hard for me to learn it. Through the help of members of Church of the Sojourners, I was able to find work as a janitor. For about seven years I worked for ToolWorks. Then last year I was hit by a car and broke my ankle and had to have a long and painful operation. But I thank God that, after four months, I was able to begin walking again. Now I am training to find new work which allows me to sit down.

I feel happy to be part of the Church of the Sojourners. I feel supported by them. I thank God that, through them, I have been able to work and support myself, and I have been well cared for and loved. The support that they have extended to me is truly from Jesus. I have learned much in this church. I have learned to be more at peace and not be such an angry person. I have learned to give to those who are in need. After my accident, my eyes were opened more to the need to love others. I'm supporting a boy overseas



Lilian Martínez

so he'll have enough food on the table and an education. By God's strength, each day I strive to keep going. Life is difficult, but you have to strive forward to love and serve. I'm grateful for my home, food on the table, and good work. I'm very grateful for the brothers and sisters in my church who have helped me become a new woman in Christ.



Trust Beyond Tragedy: Carol Steiner's Story

Sara Belser
Reba Place Fellowship

Confined by environmental illness: As I prepared to enter the Steiners' apartment where Carol spends almost all of her life, I wondered whether I was carrying on me any invisible substances that might be threatening or harmful to her. But there she was, welcoming me with a great smile and wide, expressive eyes, not looking the least bit threatened or even concerned. Halfway through the conversation, I asked tentatively if she was sacrificing her health for this visit, and she replied that, no, I wasn't going to

affect the air at all.

Carol has an environmental illness that prohibits her from going places where the mold count and air conditions affect her negatively, which includes most buildings and even the outdoors on many days. “It started out with allergies which stress my immune system,” she said. “Later, I developed many chemical sensitivities.”

How did you find Jesus? I wanted to hear how Jesus is working in the life of this woman who is part of my community, but who almost never accompanies her husband, Albert, to worship, common meals or meetings. How can she bear to be a member of

a community where she lives a life of such isolation? What does she do all the time in the apartment with the thoroughly filtered and conditioned air? Most importantly, what is God saying to her, and how is she growing with him?

“There are things in my life that I would never have chosen, and yet I would not choose my life now without what I have learned through dealing with those things. The most significant of these is what I have learned about Jesus,” she begins. “I was born into a family where there was no place for me, no love between parents or between siblings. There were many forms of abuse. It was a family that was shaped by what the Bible calls the ‘sins of the generations.’ Coming to Reba was like discovering the Bible and Jesus all over again.”

Carol struggled with depression before she came to the Fellowship in 1965 and had been hospitalized for a time. “Through a thirty-five year process, I have discovered what lay underneath a lot of the depression that I was feeling. I had subconsciously chosen depression because it was easier to live with than the anger inside me, and the anger was easier to live with than the fear, and the fear was easier to live with than the pain, which was easier to live with than the emptiness, the feeling of nothingness inside,” she slowly articulates.

I wonder, “How did you find Jesus in

“For Paul, the church is the primary unit of family.”

“If you believe salvation is an escape from the body, then what you do with your body doesn't matter. But the resurrection of the body is a sign that the Creator will redeem and restore the created order. God does aim to redeem these fallen, flawed bodies. For too long the world has been in the power of death. God means to redeem this world.”

By our practice of doing things that do not compute... we resist and confound the powers of death.”

“Radical sharing in community, like the witness of the church in Acts, is a sign that Jesus is risen from the dead... Our life together now is a sign of that great party at the end of time.”



The Bass Street Community from Atlanta leads in some of their favorite worship songs.

Christian Peacemaker Teams

Art Gish
New Life Fellowship

It's not enough to oppose war: In 1984 Ron Sider addressed the Mennonite World Conference and told Mennonites that it is not enough to oppose war. He suggested that Christians start being a nonviolent presence in the midst of violent conflicts and take the same risks for peace that soldiers take in war.

Christian Peacemaker Teams (CPT) began in 1986 as a response to that challenge and has been in Haiti, the Middle East, Chiapas, and other trouble spots. I have been privileged to be part of the team in Hebron four different times in the past five years, the most recent this past winter.

CPT in Hebron: Hebron is mentioned 70 times in the Bible. It is where Abraham and Sarah are buried and was the capital of David's kingdom for seven years. Today it is probably the most tense city in Palestine, a city often mentioned in the news.

Working with CPT in Hebron has been one way I have found to live out Jesus' call for us to be peacemakers, and to make a Christian witness in a largely Muslim city. Almost every day in Hebron Muslims ask me if I am Muslim. Often when I tell them I

am a Christian, a deep conversation ensues.

CPT is in Hebron, first, to listen and to learn. I have spent much time talking to the different factions of both sides of the conflict. I now count both Israelis and Palestinians as my friends.

The Grandmother Effect: We are also in Hebron to act as international observers. We say we have the “grandmother effect.” There are things we will not do if our grandmothers are watching. When people know they are being observed, they tend to act more responsibly. Just having international observers in places of conflict is important.

CPT not only listens and observes—we engage in nonviolent direct action. When the Number 18 bus in Jerusalem was bombed two Sundays in a row a few years ago, our teams announced that we would ride Number 18 the next Sunday. When there have been clashes between Israelis and Palestinians, we have often stood in the middle. One time our team prevented Israeli soldiers from firing their guns into a crowd of demonstrators by standing in front of the guns. We have sat on the roofs of Palestinian homes that were about to be demolished.

Most important, our actions are rooted in prayer. Daily worship and times of fasting are essential as we seek to discern how to engage the powers of evil.

Bringing together Jews, Muslims, and Christians: For two weeks this past December I lived with a Palestinian Muslim family whose home was threatened by Israeli settlers coming at night and terrorizing the family. Our team wrestled with how we could turn this ugly situation into something beautiful. How could the power of God's love break into this place of fear and hate?

The result was to bring Jews, Muslims and Christians together in that Muslim home, the end of settler activity around the house, and a public commitment from the Israeli government that the home would not be demolished. This has been my most vivid experience of victory of the principalities and powers of evil.

Here, you want more land? In wrestling with how to expose the continuing confiscation of Palestinian land, our team was reminded of Jesus' teaching that if someone who has power over you asks you to do something you should not have to do, sometimes as a form of resistance you can do more than you are ordered, to show that person the wrongness of what is happening and offer alternative possibilities. If someone wants to take your cloak, give them your underwear as well and shame them with your nakedness.

We organized an event in which Israelis, Palestinians and North American Christians took buckets of soil to an expanding Israeli settlement and said, “Here, you want more land? We will give you more land.”

CPT continues to wrestle with how to struggle against oppression armed only with the power of God's Spirit. For more information contact me (Art Gish, 13206 Dutch Creek Road, Athens OH 45701) or CPT (Box 6508, Chicago IL 60680 <cpt@igc.org>).

The preceding report by Art Gish introduced the Christian Peacemaker Teams Workshop at the Shalom Connections Conference.

Church News

News from Waco

Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Fellowship

Kids count: Recently we have counted up all the children in Hope Fellowship and found that we have fifteen kids under ten years old. That's pretty good considering we have a total of about 40 people who are members or attend worship! We realize the blessing of children, including the chaotic nature of worship at times.



A bake sale put on by the children of Hope Fellowship

In July, the children put on a drama for us and it was joyful, even if only a few of them remembered their lines! Drama, music, banner making, learning about Habitat for Humanity and Mennonite Central Committee work are some of the things our children have been doing these past months as we took a different approach to Sunday school during summer vacation. Early in the summer, Gabriela and Anali Gatlin helped the kids with a lemonade and cookie stand, and they netted enough money for all eleven participants to go to the dollar movie and have refreshments to boot. (They were even featured in the local newspaper.)

Communities learning from each other: Various of our members had interactions with Church of the Sojourners folks this summer. Joe, Nancy, and Anali Gatlin, along with Hannah Zavorka, from Church of the Sojourners, spent several weeks in

South America. Gabriela Gatlin was away at the Summer Sojourn in San Francisco for the summer. And it was good to have Ian Creeger, from Church of the Sojourners, among us visiting Dan Piche.

Our youth had a great time at Plow Creek in August, and the Gatlins and the Barrons enjoyed the Shalom Connections Conference at Reba Place.

Chad and Shayna Pollock have left Waco for China where they are spending a year teaching English at a university there.

We are in the process of reviewing four people in our church for leadership in areas of stewardship, worship, fellowship and evangelism. This is a new way of organizing the way we do things so we will be learning



News from Tiskilwa

Richard Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

Our teens and leaders (Stahnkes and Tim Gales) have returned from a vacation week in Colorado, enjoying the community life of YWAM (Youth with a Mission). Most of the men of the community are involved in constructing buildings on their property. The women are cooking, gardening, doing food preservation, and home schooling children. It was a good experience to discover the significant amount of community life that is happening at YWAM. The teens had a good week with devotional and work time in the mornings; free time in the afternoons. The mountains of Colorado are splendid! The time together was important.

About six weeks ago Michele Cutts experienced a burst appendix while in the hospital with terrible pain. We prayed and began working to process a \$27,000 hospital bill plus the surgeon's costs. When a Plow Creek Fellowship finance summary was submitted in a consultation with Graham Hospital in Canton, IL, the official recommended that we pay 10% of the hospital and surgeon's bill. (The assistant surgeon, radiologist, and anesthesiologist will be paid in full.) The full cost is then around \$4,500. That's an incredible settlement, much better than we could have asked for or imagined. We are grateful!

We have a Process Group that is dealing with the relationship between our faith and our finances. The group includes representatives from each family here at Plow Creek. We have chosen the scriptures Psalm 34, Isaiah 49:1-6, Luke 4:16-19, and Ephesians 3:14-21. So far we have raised over sixty uncomfortable, unexpected and slightly subversive questions; agreed on these foundational scriptures; and looked at the strengths of Plow Creek Fellowship. We invite your prayers as we continue the journey together, looking at assessments of strengths and needs and envisioning a faith and finance plan.

The fall is a time of transition and change for many. Ruth Anne is part-time at DePue as a parent coordinator in the pre-K, rather than as a bilingual aide. Richard is working doing Spanish-English translation, with farm work on the side.

Neil Horning and Jim Fitz are the two main farmers, with Jim being the farm manager. The Grahams are switching from home-schooling to enrolling in a Christian school

near Princeton. Steve Graham is involved in a job search because the farm income is not great. He has been doing irrigation work and machinery repairs for the farm.

Wes and Elsie Mast seem to be thriving in Eastern Pennsylvania. Wes is involved in CPE training, and Elsie has begun working full-time in a flower shop. Their new address is 532 Linden St., Bethlehem, PA 18018. They visited mid-August and took more personal belongings with them.

Matt Reha's baptism was August 27 at Camp Menno Haven. We rejoice with him in this decision. Matt spent his summer in Goshen, Indiana. He hopes to finish high school there in the fall and start studying at Goshen College in January.

The second leadership training class led by Rich and Sarah Foss will begin August 24 and continue every other week through December.

We have decided to financially support Erin Kindy on a Christian Peacemaker Teams assignment in Chiapas in October and November. She seems to be excited about this new adventure.

Chuck and Gretchen Kennedy have moved to Kenosha, Wisconsin, to be near



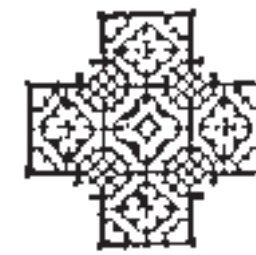
At a Reba Place work day (top to bottom): Adam Belser, Sara Belser, Rachel Flecke



Barb Grimsley and Greg Clark at Greg's Installation Ceremony as Spiritual Leader of Reba Place Fellowship

family. We are sad at their departure, but want to support them in prayer. We are very grateful for their willing spirits as they have served in many ways during their time here.

A fifteen-hour, two session training program in Theophostic ministry or prayer healing is scheduled here at Plow Creek in October. The persons involved in the training are Sarah Foss, Rolland Smith, and John Lehman.



News from San Francisco

Steve Wayer
Church of the Sojourners

Three months ago, the Summer Sojourn was in full swing, with interns here from as far away as Russia and from as close as

our own ranks. Representatives from the East Coast, Wisconsin, Texas (Gabriela from Hope Fellowship), Illinois (Sara Belser from Reba Place Fellowship), and Southern California also came. The structure was a little different this year, since our aim was to approximate real community life for the interns as much as we could. They went out to internships in the neighborhood (some with our own Laura Strzelec's Youth Industry) during the days and participated as much as they could in the church's life in the mornings, evenings, and weekends. Tim Otto taught the Monday night class on I Corinthians.

Directly after the Sojourn, most of our members headed down to the airport and then east to Chicago for the SMC conference at Reba with Richard Hays (whose commentary Tim had used in the I Corinthians study).

John and Judy Alexander returned from their mission to Church of the Servant King (CoSK) in the Los Angeles area. Not long after they returned, Joe Pillett from CoSK came up to visit, with an eye for moving up and checking out CoS.

Steve Braney, the human triple-espresso from CoSK, who was also a summer intern, returned to live with us for a year also, for which we are thankful.

Then we had our annual all-church retreat. Joe and Nancy Gatlin from Hope Fellowship came up for a weekend in the Redwoods with us. They taught on the Book of Acts, how outreach happened then, and how it can happen now. ©