

Shalom Connections

From the Shalom Mission Communities:

Plow Creek Fellowship

Hope Community, Waco, TX

Reba Place Fellowship, Evanston, IL

Church of the Sojourners,

San Francisco, CA

A Quarterly Newsletter

Spring 2000, Vol. III, No. 1

Living Community from the Divine Center An Editorial- Meditation

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

This last year has been one of the most challenging in my life—hard work forcing me to learn new things faster than I can, community changes, losses and new beginnings. I wish I could write and make sense of the outward dimensions of these struggles, but life has afforded me almost no time for that, or my other attempts to get a feeling of “things under control.”

But the good news of the last year is that I've found Jesus' companionship in a way that has carried me and answered every call for help, giving me life like never before. I just don't know how to share about it. Whenever I try to describe these experiences, the result is always so much paler than the reality. So rather than write *about* these dialogues with Jesus, I will just share raw excerpts from my journal and pray



that the One who “spoke” these silent lines will “speak” with you as well.



“David, this quiet center in which you now sit talking with me—you can carry it with you as you go through the day. My inward presence can be like a secret that gives you a confident smile in times of hardship and threatening struggle. This is not because outward circumstances won't touch you and cause you pain, but because they can not touch *who* you are and *whose* you are. You won't win every battle, but you can enjoy the fight because you know more is going on than winning or losing.

“Think of me as a flowing stream and a willow tree that is always there for you, a campsite where you can be refreshed. The Apostle John had his tree of life and his stream for the healing of the nations. Heaven isn't something to wait for. It is a place prepared within you already where we meet. So go into the day with my presence. Pay attention to

your pace and move at the pace of peace. This is an area where you have a lot to learn. I will be with you.



“Each community, each group has a spirit which

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A Community Of Communities

Reflections on the SMC Leaders Consultation in San Francisco

Sara Belser
Reba Place Fellowship

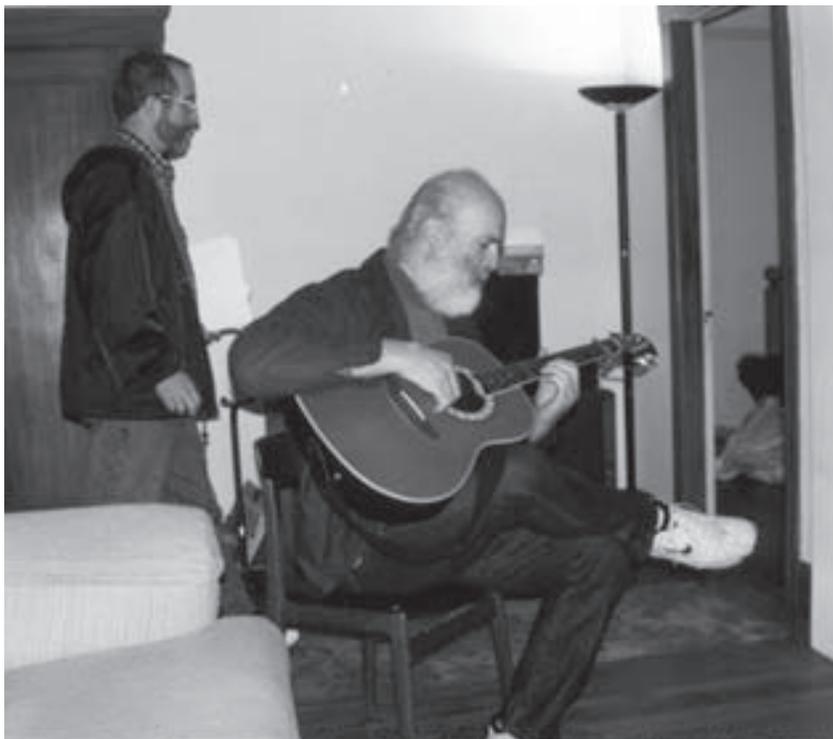
The Colors of Community In the close quarters of the Mission District of San Francisco the SMC leaders “circled up” to confer about the coming year in the lives of our communities. We were a pool of openness into which each community’s news and issues were poured, coloring the water with bright yellow joys, dark blue sorrows, fresh red pain and live



(l to r: Nancy Gatlin, Debbie Gish, Laura Hare, Sara Belser)

green hope. It was my first time out west, and my first time to participate in this gathering. I was struck with the honesty and connection we all had to each other. The waters of our common experi-

ence swirled as we tossed questions back and forth and sought resolutions together. Out of the consultation came a more focused image for me of who we are collectively as Shalom Mission Communities.



(Joe Gatlin walking, Rick Reha playing guitar)

The generosity of our hosts, Church of the Sojourners, marked our weekend. A lot of time was left for private discussion and conversations in between the larger meetings. This was a tremendous blessing because it afforded those of us from far away a chance to get to know the community while providing a relaxed atmosphere for the long, sometimes stressful deliberations. Sunday walks along the ocean and three hours of Sabbath silence refreshed our hearts and prepared our spirits in the midst of an intimate, intricate community. Our supper was surrounded with worship and communion, cementing new and old relationships in Christ.

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An Announcement and an Apology

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

You may have noticed that this newsletter is coming to you from the Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco rather than from Reba Place in Evanston. This was no *coup d'état*. Rather, Conrad Yoder and friends at Sojourners have volunteered to be the publishers of the Shalom Connections newsletter to help relieve some of the work overload that I was lamenting at our January SMC Confab. God bless 'em! I will still try to be the editor-at-a-distance. Any community news or views you want us to publish, continue to

send them to

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As we were approaching our already-once-postponed deadline for publication I received news that my mother, Hilda Janzen, had passed away. This meant I would need to leave some unfinished editorial work for Conrad, Zoe Mullery, Lilian Martinez and others to clean up and publish as best they could, while Joanne and I went to Kansas to participate in the family arrangements for a funeral and reunion. I actually look forward to the opportunity, in the next days, to work with my siblings on the obituary of the person who gave us life, a home and love—who after 93 years has found a new life, home and love beyond all our imagining. Awesome stuff this road on which we live between time and eternity! □



Book Review: The Biblical Jubilee and the Struggle for Life

by Ross and Gloria Kinsler
(Orbis Books, Maryknoll NY, 1999)

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Ross and Gloria Kinsler are a couple of biblical scholars and teachers who have immersed themselves for the last three decades in the struggle for liberation of the marginalized of Latin America as well as their offspring in North America. The authors remind us that we live in a “champagne-glass world” in which the narrow stem represents the poorest 60% of population who earn less than 6% of the world’s income while the top 20% receive 83%. When we measure control of capital, the glass is even more top-heavy. These statistics hardly tell the more important stories of misery for the poor, spiritual emptiness for the rich, and broken community for all.

The authors show us how the Bible, from beginning to end, has an analysis of this socio-economic sickness and as well as a vision of Jubilee which can restore the life of community as God intends. The formative Exodus experience of deliverance from slavery, along with the gift of the Sabbath and Jubilee requirements, were meant to ensure that God’s people would not inflict on each other what happened to them in Egypt. Israel did not always practice the Sabbath Year and Jubilee Year require-

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(Book Review, Cont. from p. 3.)

ments to cancel debts, release slaves, and redistribute the land (Leviticus 25). But these commandments were, nevertheless, a continual reference point for charismatic judges and prophets who called the people back to God's heart for social justice and community. This Jubilee vision sprang into full view in Jesus' teaching, his shared life with the disciples, and in the redistribution of capital in the early church.

The Biblical analysis of poverty pays special attention to class, often characterized as the widows, orphans, and foreigners. The pattern of poverty deepened in Bible times when a harvest failed, taxes increased or war swept over the land. Then the poor had to borrow just to survive. To pay interest on their debts they sold their land and became slaves to creditors, so that over time wealth and land were concentrated in the hands of a few families. The poor



of Latin America see their history written in the Bible, a history punctuated by revolutions, occasional land reform movements, and brutal reprisals.

At Reba and Plow Creek communities, we have had the joy of provid-

ing land to one village of refugees returned from exile to El Salvador. The blessings of that partnership have overflowed in both directions. Now the community of Valle Nuevo is struggling with how to title the land so that this modest Jubilee can be instituted for coming generations, instead of recreating class differences and the seeds of war.

At Reba we are also reflecting on how the Jubilee vision might impact our neighborhood housing patterns in Evanston where many families are renters, in debt to credit card companies, where young men have little hope of any legal means to climb out of their misery. How might the good news of Jubilee come to them in the context of our church community?

We have launched a series of experiments where our credit, housing management skills, and connections with government programs are leveraged to the advantage of the poor. This has enabled many to rent at affordable rates in a gentrifying environment. In the House of Peace Co-op twelve families are able to own a share in their building and become partners in learning the skills of supportive community. But there is much more to do than we have so far had vision and faith to implement. A few of us have found this book a rich Biblical resource for our own Jubilee transformation and are recommending it to others. I wish someone would write a similar book drawing on the North American urban context for its examples.

The Kinslers' scholarship and experience help open our eyes to Jubilee references all through the Bible where we might not have expected them. For example, the Lord's Prayer: "Give us this day our daily bread" is an allusion to

manna in the wilderness and a life with no expectation of accumulation. "Forgive us our debts as we forgive our debtors" shows the link Jesus made between forgiving

How might the good news of Jubilee come to [our neighbors] in the context of our church community?

economic debts if we want forgiveness for our sins (debts to God). Finally, the Jubilee is an expression of the kingdom of God which we pray will "come on earth as it is in heaven." Now that we know what this means, will those of us with privilege and property keep on praying for the kingdom and our own salvation? Along with much painful learning, I believe the gift of restored community with the poor awaits us. □



The End of the Reformation

Ed Loring
Open Door Community

October 31, 1999

The Catholics and the Lutherans have just signed a document ending the conflict of the Protestant Reformation. This war within the household of faith and the lands of Christendom began in 1517 when the monk Martin Luther nailed ninety-five Theses upon the church door in Wittenberg, Germany. Both groups of the Body of

Christ now agree that the individual believer is saved by grace, not by works. The papers have been signed, the Eucharist celebrated, and Martin Luther and Thomas Aquinas are, hopefully, resting better in heaven.

What is omitted from the reports I have read is the disaster that the idea of justification by faith alone has had for the Christian Church and Western Civilization since the Sixteenth Century. Paul's idea and Luther's interpretation of Paul's idea, and then Luther's interpretation of Paul's idea as interpreted by a million theologians and preachers' proclamations, all have been and are a major factor in the practice of the Christian life as indistinguishable from consumer capitalism. "Beware of false prophets; you will recognize them by what they do." Often the time lapse between the idea articulated and the recognition of that idea's consequences in the local school shootout is a long one.

The social significance of justification by faith alone is this: It does not matter what you do. Many church bulletins include a confession of sin to be prayed in unison. After the confession the worship leader says: "Hear the good news of the Gospel. In Jesus Christ your sins are forgiven." There is no structure or place for accountability. There is no discipline or action. No sense that the future is different from the past. No means to undo the consequences of the sins and errors of the past is afforded. It does not matter what I did; I am forgiven and so are you.

Since the mainline Reformation of Luther's day, the fundamental crisis of the Christian church has been community and accountability. A primary casualty of this "grace alone" theology is Christian life

rooted in a common life among believers.

Producing and nurturing a society in which it does not matter what you do has been advanced by the secularism of the West in which the consequence of life after death is lost. Heaven or hell as a "place" was rooted in the assumption of an ultimate judgment based, in large measure, upon "doing the will of Yahweh-Elohim." Miriam, Moses, Deborah, Ruth, the prophets, Jesus, and his disciples believed that it does matter what we do. That is why Jesus taught the Sermon on the Mount, the prescription for the life of discipleship. Please note that at the center of the teaching is the fundamental mark of the common life among Christians: forgiveness of one another. The more radical the Christian community, the greater the necessity for forgiveness.

James Cone, the passionate Black Theologian says, "The god of the Ku Klux Klan ain't my God." We are called to carry the cross, not burn it in some Black man's yard. What would the Black liberation movement look like if it mattered how white Christians acted toward people of color?

What would the Black liberation movement look like if it mattered how white Christians acted toward people of color?

Most Protestant theology was able to reduce the one human act necessary for a home in heaven to the belief that Jesus was the "Son of God." Thus Billy Graham and the whole revivalism movement to Christianize America could threaten

the fires of hell on the one hand and promise that one's actions did not matter on the other. There is no call to justice in Billy Graham's life or thought. He is worth millions, however.

For a while in the second half of the twentieth century, Santa Claus replaced God as an enforcer of at



least obedience to parents and teachers (Exodus 20:12). Now even that is gone. Unruly or gun-toting kids need to get their gifts to keep the economy rolling. Many companies win or lose based upon Christmas sales. Santa Claus has joined the happy chorus with a Coke in his hand. It does not matter what we do.

One of the primary consequences of the Sixteenth-century Reformation was that Protestants could charge interest on loans to church members. Usury was a sin in Catholic lands (hence the importance of Jewish bankers). But Reformer John Calvin was one of the first to say the Bible and tradition regarding interest does not matter. We can charge interest within the household of faith (even the poor will have to pay), and be justified by faith alone.

Dorothy Day, a Catholic practitioner who believed that the Sermon on the Mount is a way of life, taught that interest is a primary cause of war. It does matter how our money is spent. This is one reason thousands of us march and face arrest each November at the School of the Americas at Fort Benning, Georgia.

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Church News

News from Waco

Joe Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

The wind blows where it chooses, and you hear the sound of it, but you do not know where it comes from or where it goes. So it is with everyone who is born of the Spirit. John 3.

We are suspended for a moment in space. We expect the winds of change to come any moment now. It is like that instant before the headlong plunge down the steepest hill of a roller coaster. You know it's about to come, you've anticipated it, even desired it, yet dreaded it. Beyond all rationality, because you know what you paid for when you got on the ride. You think: it hasn't happened yet,



maybe it just won't happen, and we'll stay here, poised, but motionless forever.

For us it started last fall. First, Cristina was going to get married. We felt that jerk as the chain engaged, and we started up the long pull, heading toward the peak of the ride. We sucked in our breath because we knew that when we started down the other side, Cristina, Luz, and Emanuel would be living in Abilene, no longer part of our daily company. On the way up, though, something happened. The car stopped, and the marriage

was off. We affirmed Cristina's decision and rejoiced that the family was still here. However, we had neared the top. Our eyes shifted nervously back and forth. Something was supposed to happen here, but it didn't. Still afraid to exhale, our pent-up breath escaped in small, staccato spurts.

The car jerked again. We have started up once more. Between late winter and late spring we are going to have two more babies, a Bridgewater and a Boardman-Alexander. Even though we are accustomed to babies, we know life will be different; we don't even know their gender yet. We keep waiting and waiting, and it seems that at least this Bridgewater baby won't ever come. Anali finally made Barbara and Phillip a paper chain with one link for each day until the due date, but the chain, in a sinister way, seems to grow longer rather than shorter. It feels like a year from now we will still be waiting, although it is hard to imagine how big Barbara will be by that time.

We've made a significant decision. John, Ruth, and Ellie will be moving out of Hope Community, meaning the household that lives at 1700 Morrow. This hasn't been easy for any of us; it's even been painful at times. The change feels gigantic, but maybe it is not. They actually are going to move only two doors down, and they will still be part of Hope Fellowship, and therefore will really still be in community. And this move won't even happen for another six months. We've been through some great emotion, we think change is to come, yet things are still much the same.

Now we are not sure if Hope Community even exists any more; there is no common treasury. Yet

Hope Fellowship is entering a discussion about what community looks like, with increased commitment and mutual decision-making and greater stewardship and

We expect this new discipline and commitment will lead somewhere, but we only have inklings of what is to come.

sharing of possessions. So community has not gone away, but it seems instead that God may be leading us into a new season as the expanded community explores a deeper commitment. We wait expectantly to see what this will look like.

Chad and Shayna will be leaving, going somewhere overseas in some voluntary service project still to be discerned, and we are already starting to grieve, but this is also six months away, and they are still here, after all.

The Bridgewaters are and soon the Gatlins will be living in huge, old houses that are far too large for only 3-4 family members. We sense that with the new discussions on community and vision God will reveal some design for the blessing of this extra space, but what and how are deferred until a future gust of the Spirit.

We've just overhauled and re-shuffled our discipleship groups. The deliberations were lengthy and traumatic, but the implementation was effortless. The new groups are meeting far more regularly than the old. We expect this new discipline and commitment will lead somewhere, but we only have inklings of what is to come.

At least three members sense stirrings that job changes may be coming, but the feelings are vague and directions yet unclear so that there is only the unfulfilled sense that change is coming.

Meanwhile, with the portent of change in every direction, all of us inevitably are aging. More than 1/3 of our 18 adult members are over 40; no longer can we call ourselves a community of young people. With Jim and Ria leading the way into senior adulthood, the rest of us, all the way down to tiny Miranda, watch those who are ahead of us as we figure out what it means to follow Jesus in a new stage of life. This change happens not breathlessly, but weekly, at least monthly, as we perceptibly inch forward.

One of the items on our docket is for Hope Fellowship to look seriously at the Shalom Mission Communities commitments, to see if we should pick up, embrace, and carry forward the relationship that Hope Community first developed. One person expressed a concern about the renunciation of possessions: will we be able to find a tangible and significant way to live out of this commitment? Given all that we are experiencing, or at least feel we are about to experience, we might also question the commitment entitled *Stability*. Things seem to be shifting, and our

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Year of Prayer. We knew
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shortsighted faith, which can sometimes focus only as far as our own legs and feet, makes us feel unsteady.

On the cusp of change, various ones of us have yielded momentarily to the fear that meaningful things, things that we think should remain permanent, are disintegrating. Fear comes natural at a point of change. We've entered into a Year of Prayer. We knew it was a dangerous thing to do.

For a long time we have heard the clankety-clank of the chain. Our



position shifts and we have leveled out. Now there is silence, a pregnant pause, a seemingly endless moment of waiting. "Relax," the external, eternal voice tells us, "loosen your grip or you'll break your fingers."

We know that in a divine split-second, in our human measurement probably only a few weeks or months, we will feel the full force of the wind as it hits our face. Our point of view will be whipped around and down and up into a radically different perspective. Come, babies we are definitely ready. Come, increased commitment and a fuller experience of grace, love, and unity. Come, whatever changes the Spirit may desire. We are ready to lift our hands toward the sky, squeal with delight, and be whisked along for a wild ride. Come, Lord Jesus, come.

Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Community

Since the last Shalom Connections we have had a major change in Hope Community. After months of talking and praying about it, the

Boardman-Alexanders decided to withdraw from Hope Community. Since the Boardman-Alexanders and the Gatlins were the only families in Hope Community, this decision affected the Gatlins in a very great way. At this time, Hope Community is not really in existence, though the Gatlins continue to feel called to life in intentional community.

Both families are living at 1700 Morrow until August when a jointly-owned house will be vacated by renters in our church, the Pollocks. The Boardman-Alexanders will move at that time and begin purchasing the house. We have separated our finances but continue to share some common meals and time together.

This has not been an easy process. We were helped immensely by Virgil Vogt's visit in late January. He came to facilitate dialogue between the two families. His presence helped us to communicate more openly. We were able to express our more difficult emotions as well as our deep love for one another. The time together was meaningful and powerful.

Virgil also spent time with members of Hope Fellowship. During his stay we conducted pastoral reviews of Joe and Nancy, our pastoral team. This was also a very positive experience. We had a membership meeting where we talked about areas of growth. In this meeting, the Boardman-Alexanders took time to share more about their reasons for leaving intentional community. A major one is the realization that community occurs among members of our church even though they are not living in household or participating in a common purse.

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During the membership meeting both the Gatlins and Boardman-Alexanders were able to share their feelings about what was happening. It was a profound time in the life of our church as we could share on such a deep level with our brothers and sisters.



News from Winnipeg

Marcus Rempel
Grain of Wheat

NEW LEADERS, NEW DIRECTIONS

We took on two new servant leaders this fall: Marvin Hamm and Beth Sawatsky. They are coming in to fill the third and fourth position on our leadership team. The third position has been open since Dorothy Rempel resigned this past spring, and the fourth position will be vacated this summer when Jarem Sawatsky heads off to Virginia with his wife Rhona to study in the Conflict Transformation program at Eastern Mennonite University for two years.

Grain of Wheat is also about to change one of the few community structures that has been a constant since "the early years": Small groups are on the table. We're

looking at diversifying the format of small groups to include ministry groups and focus-oriented groups (e.g. parenting issues) as an alternative to the sharing/accountability groups we have had for so many years. One significant implication of this is that we will now choose which groups we join instead of having leadership choose them for us. We are also going to be inviting non-members to join these groups if their hearts lead them to. Please pray for a special measure of God's wisdom and grace as we make the transition.

COMINGS AND GOINGS

Last month we "initiated" four new members into Grain of Wheat. We've also had quite a few people step back from full membership or leave Grain of Wheat altogether this year. Some have withdrawn because of theological differences, others have experienced hurtful relationships, and some have moved on out of family, job or other personal reasons. Apparently, our population boom of the past few years is petering out. For whatever reasons people have left, we have tried to bless them and send them into God's wide world even as we miss their presence among us.

DEATH AND HEALING

In the past month, Grain of Wheat members have lost two loved ones. Nancy Pauls lost her father to Parkinson's-related health complications. Please pray for Nancy's family and especially her mother who are grieving the loss of their husband and father. Paul and Tabitha Langel lost a dear friend, Werner Wurtz, who very unexpectedly took his own life on January 20th. Werner had been struggling with depression for some time, but his death came as a massive shock to his family and

friends. Werner was a frequent attendee at Grain of Wheat worship services and was a familiar friend of many members of our prayer team. I don't think any of us have assimilated the full tragedy of his being gone and how he left us. We ask for your prayers, especially for Werner's two children and for Werner's own soul. The need for God's healing is great.

We have experienced a story of wonderful healing amongst us this year. This past October, Marie Moyer, one of our adherents, was driving a van full of Bible College students to a volleyball game when she lost control of the vehicle and it flipped down the highway. She was more seriously hurt than any of her passengers, sustaining an injury to her spinal cord in her neck. In the past months, Marie has progressed from being on a respirator to wearing a neck brace, and from having paralyzed legs and weakened arms to being able to walk considerable distances using a walker and a knee brace. She still uses a wheelchair to get around most places, but will soon be moving back to Canadian Mennonite Bible College, where she has already resumed taking a couple of classes since Christmas. Marie has been an inspiration to be around. Her spirit of joy and courage has ministered to all those who have visited her, as well as to all the staff and other patients at the Rehab Hospital. Marie has been coming out to worship with us from the first day she was able to get a Sunday morning day pass. Just her presence with us is a celebration of God's goodness. However, we have started to realize what a barrier all those steps are in that old stone church building that we worship in. What to do? Renovate? Move? Marie is making us

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everyone breaths in and out. This spiritual atmosphere can be trustful, healing, truth-seeking, and humble. This environment can also become toxic, deceitful, manipulative. A spiritual leader must be especially attentive to this spiritual environment and lift it up in prayer and communal awareness.

“However, each one is responsible for the good and the bad that you exhale into this atmosphere. This means taking responsibility for your own spiritual condition. Know your need and pray for your deliverance. You can present yourself as a living sacrifice, centered in God, responsible as an adult for what you contribute to the spirit of our community.”

What does it mean to become a spiritual adult?

“One thing this means is to accept responsibility for your own emotions and your need for healing. An adult does not say, ‘So and so made me angry.’ No one can make you angry. It is more truthful to confess, ‘I am angry,’ ‘I am hurt,’ ‘I am anxious,’ ‘I am confused.’ Once you own your attitude you can present yourself to God who is ready to help you fight for a good spirit. And before you call on God for help, the Spirit is already helping you to pray and to receive the changes.



“David, you have been listening to me. When we walk closely together in the spirit your thoughts will become more and more trustworthy. I am in you and you in me. Don’t take that to mean anything grandiose. It’s just the ordinary way I like to be with people I have created, grieved

over, forgiven, suffered with. I love you more than my life. I want you to know how much you are loved, and out of that you will bear fruit. That is why I am investing so much in you. This is your secret. It can be everyone’s secret.



“David, I created you for communion, but with a lot of freedom, like I have. This communion of free beings is the kind of communion that pleases me. You have no idea how much I love you and the creations of your world. Why am I investing so much in you? Because I want you to know the joy I have in giving all for love.”

Jesus, I’ve just reread my journal from past days and see how your

I want you to know how much you are loved, and out of that you will bear fruit.

grace has been sufficient for me in every hard time, and so much more. I also see how I’ve been such a poor steward of these gifts.

“Don’t worry, David, about how poor you are. You’ll only grow as you experience more of my love. This is what I had in mind when I said, ‘I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.’ To know me, and the Father through my Spirit with you, this is what makes people spiritually alive, and therefore alive on every level, because it is in the spirit that life hangs together. All other organizing centers become idolatries and distortions of the true Life that flows from the One who created all, who sees the purpose for all, and who is eager to communicate this ‘why’ as fully as

humans can receive it.



“David, while you were sleeping I was watching you in love and care. You have no idea what a marvel you, and the whole human race, really are. I died for you in obedience to the Father’s will. But the love I have is only passing on what I have received from Abba, Father. I wish you had an experience of teamwork like we have in the Trinity—so utterly different we are in form and yet united in love and purpose.”

Jesus, I have come to know you as someone who is hopelessly in love with the human race, especially fascinated with our variety and what we do with our freedom, and eager to forgive us as soon as we ask. I am overwhelmed by the realization that the Father delights in all of us, and there is nothing we can do about that. God’s nature is community and the resources of his world are meant for community. And where people catch onto the nature of this love for us, they want to have all things in common, because community has its source in You, the Father and the Holy Spirit—the original community. Halleluia!



I feel like I should give an account of myself to you. But you already know me. I am the one who is distant from myself. This “me” seems to be without a center until I take time to be with you, who dwells closer to me than I to myself. Still, you hold me in being when I am scattered and living out my life on the surface, where everything seems disconnected.

“David, whenever you find yourself alone and under compulsion, call

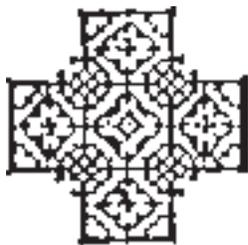
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to me, cause I am already within you. As you do this more and more, you will learn to live out of your divine center. You don't need to hold your being together with inventories, lists, reminders, diagrams. Those tools may be useful for communication your needs to yourself and to others, but you are already saved by living under my attention and grace. When you are fully awake to this truth, you will be empowered to do the work of love and truth. It will flow out of your being, which is being-with-me. Hey, I like you, David. Get used to it."

Is there anything I can do to turn you off, Jesus?

"Yes. If you treat others as if you have not received this radical grace and forgiveness from me, that riles me up and I will deal with you. But I will not forsake you." (Matthew 6:14, Matthew 18:27-35, Mark 11:26, James 2:13.)



(Reformation, Cont. from page 5.)

We Christians in America had to somehow find a way to proclaim the gospel and still feel at home among politicians who call for bombs to fall on Iraq, for the death penalty, and the use of prisons for the social control of the African American male population. And we did! Theologians of justification by God's grace alone came up with an idea: Universalism. God's love



is so undemanding and so unconditional that it does not matter what anyone or any society does. Everybody is going to heaven! But a heaven for everybody is a heaven for nobody. The belief in life after death died.

Dostoevsky warned us in the 1880's that if God does not exist, then anything goes. The doctrine of justification by faith alone and its corollary of no judgment after death has led to Christian atheism: Christians who live lives as though it does not matter what they or the economy does. Thus, we see rich Christians. We have church members who serve in the military—even in peacetime. There are still white church members who work to keep white power on the Republican Party agenda. Women are belittled and abused and taught to forgive the man without his repentance or therapeutic intervention. The homeless are left without housing, and we love our neighbors mostly in our prayers. But it does not matter. We are saved by God's grace alone.

So we are thankful. We praise our loving Creator and Redeemer, who yearns for reconciliation and friendliness on earth. We are hopeful in response to the Lutherans and Catholics signing an end to the Reformation schism. We are amazed and joyful because of the good news of the gospel of Jesus Christ our Lord. We, too, know that this Yahweh-Elohim and Jesus Christ and the Holy Spirit do love and forgive and redeem each

one of us who believe, repent, and practice the way. As Martin Luther put it so well, "We are simultaneously saints and sinners."

Nonetheless, in the social context of individualism, in the cultural context of consumer capitalism, and the faith context of no communal solidarity with the poor and oppressed, the loving message of justification by God's unconditional love has led the church and society to practice a way of life in which it does not matter what we do. Thus we have become disciples of consumer capitalism. Homelessness is the consequence and the proof of the lie we believe.

The Radical Left Wing of the Reformation had a better center of faith than the Catholic or the mainline Protestant theologians and practitioners. Most accepted salvation by grace alone, as we certainly do. (Thank you, Jesus!) Yet, the center of their understanding was discipleship—the call to "follow Jesus." Discipline was a mark of the Church. Here it mattered a whole lot.

"Be on your guard against false prophets....You will know them by what they do," says Jesus. His way of life mattered. He was executed for it.

Ed Loring is a partner at the Open Door Community in Atlanta, Georgia. This article is condensed, with the author's permission, from a longer essay that first appeared in Hospitality.

(SMC Leaders, Cont from p. 2.)

The gathering included unique personalities from the four SMC communities plus Community House (Cincinnati) and the Church on West Street (Garden Grove, CA). Various opinions on everything from spiritual accountability to email were voiced and thrown into the pot from which we drew our conclusions and made decisions. Topics we chewed on were: “imparting vision for sacrifice and shared life,” “encouraging new leadership,” “fostering mutual discernment,” “nurturing the ‘one another’ life,” and “overcoming cultural barriers to community.” John Alexander (from Church of the Sojourners) noted how hard it was to share deeply enough to support each other in only one weekend. We agreed to exchange our news in writing before our next consultation so that we could spend more time addressing the issues that each community’s news brought up.

Spiritual accountability between communities was the one issue we considered most thor-



(l to r: Ian Creeger, Barb Grimsley, Hannah Zazvorka, Judy Alexander, Sara Belser, Jaime Zazvorka)

oughly. We discussed the pros and cons of structured accountability between communities and the benefit we are to each other as a group of Christian communities. We want to be close enough to each other so that we can “speak into each others’ lives” (the hot phrase of the weekend). We want outside reviews of our communities to hear from the grass roots if

leadership is squelching the members’ voices so that communities don’t split over leader-member tensions. I have felt the effects of this personally at Reba and heard of it happening in other places, so I was glad for the discussion, although I was more interested in the topic of “overcoming cultural barriers to community.”

The two Barbs helped us out with some uplifting humor. Barb Weiner, from Church on West Street, made the funniest comments that lightened us up and bonded us together. Barb Grimsley made me smile with her wise jokes and warm remarks. After our trip to Haight Street (where all the punks hang out), she mentioned that she had felt weird and out-of-place dressed like she usually dresses (as a “normal” person).

Each of the four Shalom Mission Communities got to lead worship at the opening of one of our meetings. Rick Reha graciously helped some of the communities

(Continued on page 12.)



(l to r: Kevin Rains, Joe Gatlin, Barb Wiener, Barb Grimsley, Anne Gavitt, Nancy Gatlin, Tim Otto)

(SMC Leaders, Cont from p. 11.)

that were less musically oriented with skillful guitar accompaniment.

Community House and Church on West Street were good additions to the gathering. We look forward to more relationship with them and their possible memberships in SMC.

A highlight this year was input from Sojourners' youth about life in community. The Sunday afternoon session was an opportunity for a dialogue which reminded me of last summer's "Youth in Community" workshop at Plow Creek. Jaime and Hannah Zazvorka and Ian Creeger, who weren't there last summer, expressed gratitude for life in community. They also voiced a little confusion, out of which seemed to arise a plea for more support—without expectation—from the adults of the community. This sparked some coffee-break discussions among older adults in which it was evident that the youth of many of our communities have prominent places in their hearts.

Overall, I was very pleased with this SMC leaders' meeting. I loved meeting and connecting with all sorts of people in different ways. We are looking ahead toward training new leadership for this group. If other groups join SMC, we need to think about organizing regionally for tighter relationships. Letters and emails are flying as discussions started that weekend continue and more visits are planned. Let us move forward in God's calling to community as we are bonded to him in a community of communities. We look forward to the best community of communities when His kingdom has come to earth and love is made perfect. □

(Winnipeg, Cont. from page 8.)

all realize that we are inaccessible to many. Pray for us as we seek to overcome the barriers.



News from San Francisco

Steve Wayne
Church of the Sojourners

The recent breakup of Church of the Servant King in Gardena, California has had a deep effect on us. John and Judy Alexander were part of this church during a formative period of their lives and brought many of CoSK's forms and beliefs with them to our church. Since the breakup, we have been sending people down regularly to encourage the people remaining and to help them to continue the work. Jack and Edith Bernard, John and Judy Alexander and Dan and Kelly Zazvorka have been the main visitors, but many others have also gone down for a bit.

John and Judy will be going down for a stay of several months starting in March. We hope that their encouragement, teaching, and pastoring will push CoSK over the hump and back toward unity and health.

We recently had our accountability board (Sally Schreiner, Bob and Cheryl Sachar, and Bob Appelby, a local pastor) out to help us think about all the changes John and Judy's extended time away will bring. Their main word to us was "fear not!" —a good word at any time.

In other news, we were pleased to host the SMC conference here, and to renew our relationships with folks from all the communities. We especially appreciated the fact that many of the delegates were "just folks," not all leaders.

Jeff and Laura Hare are now the official, forever-and-ever parents of Naomi Jane Hare. The adoption was final as of February! We marked the happy occasion with a celebration—cake, activities, and all. Naomi had a good time, but then, she always does.

The last weekend in February will be our first ever "Nature and Purpose of the Church" seminar done exclusively for youth. We are looking forward to having visitors from Hope Community and from CoSK here. Get 'em while they're young!



News from Tiskilwa

Plow Creek Fellowship

In November, neighbor Ronnie Banuska was instantly killed in a tragic tractor accident. We hosted a funeral service and offered our cemetery for burial. In earlier years, we had opened our homes to the Banuska family when their house in Tiskilwa burned, so they again called on us for help. Banuskas have no local church, but have been involved with a Hebrew Christian group in Iowa. The internment ceremony was different than

what Plow Creek had yet seen and included blowing the shofar to the four winds.

On December 5, Plow Creek Church celebrated the membership of Neil and Tutuk Horning. We were graced by their singing a duet in Indonesian. At noon, we continued the celebration with a Love Feast, Communion, and Foot Washing. The Hornings moved here last June after serving two terms with MCC in Indonesia.

In June, Wes and Elsie Mast will temporarily relocate to Pennsylvania, so Wes can attend a 12-15-month training program in Clinical Pastoral Education, and so Elsie can be more involved with her family members in that area. Wes has confirmed his interest in work as a hospital chaplain through a weekend job as chaplain in a Peoria hospital.

In anticipation of the Masts' absence, Plow Creek Church has replaced Wes as Elder, calling Louise Stahnke, who began serving in early February. Recently Lynn Reha was also called as an elder to join Louise and Rich Foss in giving leadership to the congregation.

A major February event was the Annual Review of Church Life. Wayne Hochstetler, Mennonite Conference minister, and Ruth Boardman Alexander of Hope Community in Waco, TX, joined us for this. Questions coming out of the Review on which we are working include "Who at Plow Creek is taking responsibility for long-range financial planning?" and "How are we going to manage our finances?" The Fellowship has formed a new process group representative of our diversity to lead us in discernment of lifestyle

and financial issues.

Other current news: Neil Horning is moving into more responsibility for the Farm. Ruth Anne Friesen has a new job teaching Spanish-speaking high-risk preschoolers in DePue. And we eagerly await reports from the visit to our sister community, Valle Nuevo in El Salvador, from "Creekers" David Stahnke, Hannah Foss (taking time out from her college studies), Rod and Carol Orr and daughters Erica and Emily, and Jim Fitz. Jim is giving leadership for the first time to this annual delegation of Plow Creek and Reba Place folks and friends.



News from Evanston and Chicago

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

A new spiritual leader: On February 23, by unanimous consent, Greg Clark was confirmed as the "Spiritual Leader" of Reba Place Fellowship for a three-year term. This was historic and surprising for us in several ways. This is the first time in more than twenty years that the Fellowship has had its own pastoral leadership distinct from Reba Place Church. The process of reviewing our structures, weighing what kind of leadership we need, asking members for nomination, and testing this calling has all broken new ground for us. The unity God has given is most energizing at this point in our life.

Greg Clark, who is head of the

philosophy department at North Park University, also happens to be one of the youngest members in a Fellowship replete with older leaders. We believe God is preparing Reba for a new adventure with a younger generation who will be coming to give energy and direction, complimenting the experience and wisdom that is already here. Along with the selection of Greg comes a serious commitment to support Heather and Greg as parents of Micah (4) and Ransom (1) so that Heather can also make her contribution to community life. Greg will begin his duties at the end of June when a Sabbatical year opens before him. He is choosing a small leadership team for support and accountability.

RPF.com: For the past twenty years, Reba Place Fellowship has functioned as two communal groups (Living Hope Fellowship and Emmanuel Cluster) with only a loose coordination around issues like common property. As long as Fellowship leaders were also church leaders, this arrangement, parallel to congregational clusters, had a certain coherence. But in recent years we found these structures were keeping us apart and preventing a common identity and mission from emerging as a Fellowship.

With the new year, by God's grace, we were able to say goodbye to our old groups and join forces in a single common treasury made of seven small groups. The new entity (at least for our accounting purposes) needed a new name which we have dubbed "RPF.com." The "com" stands for "communal," "communion," "all things in common," etc. However, some of us believe this name is so cool it is enough to vault us into the 21st

(Continued on page 14.)

(*Evanston, Cont. from page 13.*)

century along with all the other techies who imagine they rule the world from their keyboards. Some day we may get a web-site too.

Saying goodbye to Lehmans:

On February 13, we hosted a farewell for John and Joanna Lehman. This was the sad conclusion to a painful and inconclusive three-year church investigation of allegations of pastoral misconduct. John felt he could no longer function as a therapist and community member in this setting, given the Lehmans' disappointed in the level of support they received from Reba leadership. The Lehmans, who have been here since 1957, were our only remaining founding members of Reba Place Fellowship.

The farewell celebration was a grace-filled time of remembering all the gifts God has given to us in the Lehmans 43 years of service at Reba and grieving the losses we share. John and Joanna have

moved to Florence, Kansas, where they are setting up a counseling practice along with departing Fellowship member, Bev Wiebe. In Florence the Lehmans and Bev will be near family and a circle of supportive long-time friends. We continue to pray for more healing and blessing in their new venture of faith.

Weddings of two "Reba kids":

Jeanne and Allan Howe (along with Linda Kelsey) traveled to Seattle, Washington, to celebrate the marriage of their son James Marcus Howe to Danae Jones. Ask Allan about all the things that can go wrong with a wedding on a boat—and it still be a glorious occasion.

Eloise Davis, Julius and Peggy Belser recently traveled to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, to celebrate the marriage of Brian Davis to Leah Dione. We are blessed to see that a couple of "our kids" are choosing life partners in the context of Christian support and commitment. □

Coming Soon to a Newsletter Near You...

Conrad Yoder
Church of the Sojourners

Greetings from your new publisher! As David Janzen had mentioned earlier in this issue (there was no Winter issue—we decided to catch up with the season), I will be taking over publishing and production of *Shalom Connections*, for the foreseeable future. Others here in the Mission District of San Francisco will be partnering with me to fully bring it to you, while still under David's editor-in-chief role. Also, the newsletter will be getting a make-over, starting with the next issue, in terms of looks and new features, as we take it into this new era. While the facade will be different, the content will remain the same—edifying articles along with news from our sister churches. A more complete introduction will be given in the next issue. See you there! □

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