

Shalom Connections

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Visiting Friends

Reflections returning from El Salvador

Jim Fitz
Plow Creek Fellowship

Dear Friends,

As I write this, I am flying to Chicago on my way home from El Salvador. The visit to Valle Nuevo had a lot of positive aspects. I guess the best for me was to visit with many friends I've made there over the years. It seems that is one of my main missions. Many of them opened their arms wide and gave me a big hug, saying, "this is for so and so," naming all the people they remember and then saying, "for the whole church at Plow Creek." Their friendship has been really wonderful and seems to be a real gift of God. Another really positive thing was the hard, hot walk to the Lempa River, where they feel God delivered them to Honduras in 1981. This yearly trek has been a way for them to remember what God did for them. They liken it to the Children of Israel crossing the Red Sea. It is a good way for us to share in that act of God. It was a special treat this year to have Yvonne Dilling as a leader for the group. She was there and helped swim the people across the river that day in 1981. She has shared her insights with our group from many years of living in El Salvador.

Jesus has been so zealously worshipped, his deity so vehemently affirmed, his halo so brightly illumined, and his cross so beautifully polished, that in the minds of many he no longer exists as a man. He has become an exquisite celestial being who momentarily lapsed into a painful involvement in the human scene, and then quite properly returned to his heavenly habitat. By thus glorifying him we more effectively rid ourselves of him than did those who tried to do so by crudely crucifying him.

Clarence Jordan

A less positive aspect of the trip was to see the distrust that has developed in the community since the war. Their lack of unity has made them lose out on housing projects and help from various non-governmental organizations, because they couldn't agree on what to do. In Valle Nuevo they are struggling for unity on how to go about titling the land we helped them buy. I was able to attend a meeting between the new land committee and those in whose names the titles were placed temporarily seven years ago. This was the first time these folks have met together with the new Land Committee to share different points of view. In the absence of meetings, rumors have been hurtful.

Initially in the meeting, each side expressed their distrust of the other, then were able to replace the rumors with truth. Hopefully, it was a beginning of real cooperation. It seemed in some ways a miracle. My sense is that everyone came away feeling positive. An American volunteer who was helping on the project thought my presence helped to ensure that everyone could come and share frankly. We have had breakthroughs like this before, then something happens to derail the process. So I am cautiously optimistic. Now my part is to support them in prayer.

I carried some literature from the Spanish Mennonite Seminary in Guatemala which I took to the school in Valle Nuevo. They were very interested, saying they had no religious material in their library, and seemed very grateful for it, a little to my surprise. The dedication of the teachers in their school is quite something.

A new thing in Valle Nuevo was the use of drama by the youth, along with singing and folk dancing. This new development

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What Brings "Latter Day Saints" to Reba Place Fellowship?

As told by Andrew Bolton to David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

What does the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (RLDS) have in common with an Anabaptist intentional community like Reba? Andrew Bolton, Coordinator of Peace and Justice Ministries for the RLDS, led a May 19-21 delegation of fourteen visitors from their Harvest Hills cooperative housing community near Independence, Missouri, to exchange views and experiences with Reba. The following interview with Andrew tells the story of his encounter with Anabaptist theology and the impact this vision of church-as-community is having on his ministry and the renewal of community in the RLDS denomination. What we have in common will emerge as you read on.

I think my early childhood in a rural village in northern England has given me a longing for greater community. My father had been a soldier for seven years in World War II. The family suffered from his anger, temper and alcoholism. When I was eight, we had to leave our farm because of his drinking. I prayed often for God to make my father well. It did not happen until I was fourteen. Then one night I saw my Mum and Dad talking seriously. The doctor had persuaded my Dad that if he did not stop drinking, he would have him arrested. He was perhaps longing for something to help him stop. From that time on, he became a

real father and a companion to me in my teenage years. I began to do well in school, and things went better for my three younger brothers and me.

I was brought up Roman Catholic, but in college I began questioning all that. In 1969 I went to Oregon to work in horticulture for the summer. This was wonderful for a nineteen-year-old. We climbed Mount Hood and claimed it for the Queen! We rafted down glacial streams. And there I met a Mormon woman who befriended me and made me think about my faith.

Two years later, while studying in Germany, I prayed to God to know which church I should belong to. Then I met folks from the Reorganized Church of Latter Day Saints (RLDS), a denomination which did not have those things that I found objectionable in the Mormons. The quality of their friendship and fellowship was amazing. They loved me. They were Germans, the people my father had fought against, but the Gospel was reconciling all that. I felt I had to choose



Andrew Bolton

between despair and baptism, no matter what my friends and family might think. I believed that God could make the world a better place, and the beginning of this was for me to be changed. I began to understand that we see what God is like in Jesus.

After baptism I met my wife-to-be, Jewell. She was a RLDS volunteer from the U.S. We were married in 1977. Both of us were enamored of the Kibbutz movement for a time.

Holding down a full-time teaching job, I was also a lay pastor for three years. Then



Anne
Gavitt

we went to Japan for a couple of years to teach English as a second language. After that I studied for a Masters of Arts to prepare for full-time ministry. I became aware of historic Anabaptism and was really attracted to it. However, I was a somewhat critical and arrogant about the institutional church and was fired at the end of the training in 1985. This was a very painful experience.

After 1985, instead of biology I began to teach religious education in a public high school. We lived in inner-city Leicester where white Christians were a minority among Sikhs, Muslims, Hindus, Jews and Africans. How exciting to be among all this pluralism! I pondered, *What would it mean for Christians to bear good news to folks like these given the legacy of crusades, colonialism and the holocaust?* It became clear to me that we would have to become non-violent and to see Jesus in the face of the stranger.

I was shocked to see that some people were actually living out the dream

Our denomination has a dream of the kingdom of God coming on this earth which we call Zion. But when I encountered the Bruderhof at Darvell (England), I was shocked to see that some people were actually living out the dream. It was no longer enough for me to just be comforted and inspired by the dream. So my wife and I lived a year at Darvell. Eventually, in a very respectful way, they asked us to leave and to consider if we could return to community putting aside the book of Mormon. It was very difficult for Jewell and me to come to unity about what we should do. Returning to "normal life" was most challenging.

After Darvell I had a chance to train
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Shalom Connections

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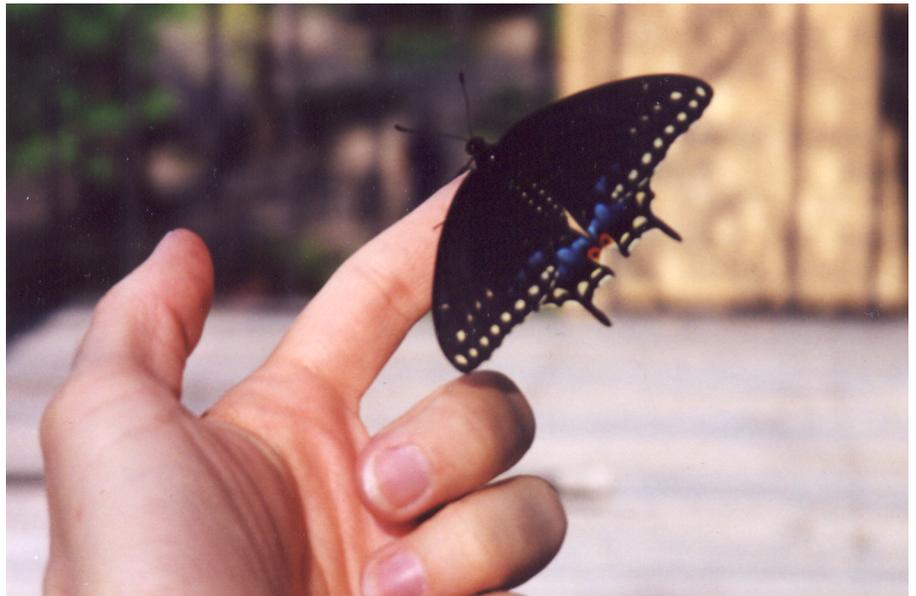
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A newborn butterfly

Photo: Heather Clark

A New Look Shalom Connections Heads West

Conrad Yoder
Church of the Sojourners

As you've noticed by now, things look a little different here in *Shalom Connections* land. We hope you enjoy the new layout and styles. I personally have had fun playing with and designing this new format.

A little of my history—when I was in college, I worked part-time for a small pre-press/self-service Macintosh shop. On the wall was a large poster of the complete Adobe Type Library. I was immediately fascinated by all the different styles and amounts of fonts. I thought to myself, “Wouldn't it be neat to work for Adobe!” Sure enough, four years later I was working part-time at Adobe while in graduate school, and full-time afterwards. While I do not currently work on fonts (I customize PostScript for large-format printers), I have had access to them and other software which has made it easy and enjoyable for me to put my hobbies to work to help bring you this newsletter.

For those of you who are interested in some of the details, this newsletter is created with Adobe InDesign on a Macintosh PowerBook G3. It is printed on a Minolta PageWorks 25 laser printer with the Adobe PostScript 3 and duplexing options. The

banner font on the front cover in which “Shalom Connections” is set in Cronos. The article text is Adobe Garamond, which was chosen for (I feel) its superior legibility. I hope you find it the same way.

A new section starting with this issue is called “Getting Acquainted.” It will feature one family unit from each of our churches each issue. Our hope is that this will help to bridge the great distances among many of us, so that we have other ways of getting to know each other beyond spending lots of money on airline tickets.

In periodicals, there is usually a “marker” at the end of each story. What looks like a possible reference to a friendly alien creature from the movies is really an old-style amper-sand, which represents the “and-ness” of this newsletter and our lives together. Also on page 3 is the sidebar which gives all our contact information, along with some semi-legal declaration requirements, in one convenient location. Old features such as church updates, book reviews and edifying spirituality will continue to appear in *Connections*.

And let's not forget the people! Also helping with the newsletter here at Sojourners are Zoe Mullery, our new copy editor, and Lilian Martinez, who faithfully collates, folds and seals all the newsletters for me to take to the post office. We got a practice flight doing the last issue and forge ahead full-throttle on this run.

If you have any comments or ideas about this new style, I would appreciate hearing them. I hope you continue to enjoy the newsletter as it moves into this new phase and I, along with Zoe and Lily, look forward to serving SMC in this way. ☺

What's a life for?

An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Are the radical promises of Jesus true?

I don't mean true as doctrine which, if you agree with it, gets you a ticket to heaven. But have we tested the Good News with our lives and found Jesus trustworthy? If you lose your life for his sake, will you find it? If you serve others in secret, will God reward you? If you persist in forgiving others, will God renew your heart with forgiveness and joy as well? If you sell out, give away, and seek the kingdom of God first, will you have what you need? Living in Christian intentional community is a bold attempt to test the reliability of Jesus' teachings within the context of our shared lives. What are the results of our experiments?

A few months ago Conrad Yoder suggested that we include, as a regular feature of this newsletter, biographical sketches of some of our community members. Over time this would help our communities to get to know one another better across the miles and between the times of our annual Shalom gatherings. So in this newsletter you will find the first batch of profiles, one from each SMC community. We hope to see more if we're not too shy.

Biography—an attempt at immortality?

These profiles, which really amount to spiritual pilgrimages, raise an interesting question for me. Once upon a time, long ago, in another life, I taught a college history course called "Biography." There we pondered the question, "Why do we try to preserve life stories in the face of death and forgetfulness?" In classical Greece and Rome biographies were usually written with the aim of making immortal the noble deeds of noble people. Similarly, in the Bible (Genesis 11:1-9) we read of a people who said, "Let's build a city with a tower that reaches the sky, so that we can make a name for ourselves..." And their monument, the Tower of Babel, has become for all generations since, an undying symbol of futility.

To the glory of Me

In our age young people are encouraged to choose majors early in college and to dream big about what they will become. Relationships, jobs, social groups are but rungs on a ladder we are expected to climb in the course of a career. Our media glorifies those who have climbed the highest on this ladder called "self-fulfillment." The meaning of life is to build a tower to the glory of ME. In such a world many financial fortunes are made while social capital is squandered—democracy goes to the highest bidder, education loses its purpose, families splinter, communities dissolve, the poor give up, and young people turn violent. Information is multiplied and travels at ever more megabytes per second. But is anyone really listening? Alienation, rather than solidarity, is our harvest.

Biographical sketches in the Bible

have a different purpose than personal immortality. Stories of Joseph, Moses, David, and Peter, for example, have the function of showing how the Spirit moved in these



flawed people's lives to accomplish God's purposes in history on behalf of a called-out community. The good deeds and the failures, the providence and tragedy all became part of God's creative action. Joseph could look back over his youthful arrogance, his brothers' betrayal and his role as deliverer of Egypt, to say, "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good." The Biblical witness is that those who put their trust in God will find that finally everything gets recycled for good on behalf of the people of God, and for the world.

In this newsletter, and in coming issues, you will find spiritual sketches of persons and couples who stumbled onto a different

purpose for living than the way of the world. They decided to make an experiment with their own lives to see if the paradoxical call of Jesus is true. "If any want to become my followers, let them deny themselves, take up their cross and follow me. For those who want to save their life will lose it and those who lose their life for my sake will find it." Matthew 16:24-25.

Have they found their lives?

I think the people whose stories follow can affirm that while losing their lives they are also finding their lives according to the promise. Jesus' wisdom flows from the nature of God who is community. This nature is reflected in our own image and in the way everything created works. It turns out that where people are seeking their own lives, community dies. And where they give themselves for Jesus and one another their true self finds roots and grows. But it's never the self or the community they had idealized. The old self has to die along with the old dreams of self-fulfillment. And in that place, a renewed community can flourish for the good of others as well as the self that God knows and loves. In this soil souls flourish, love grows and there are celebrations of peace on the way to peace.

Let's not build another tower

On Memorial Day we had a Reba Place Fellowship picnic that stands in my memory as a wonderful moment of peace in the midst of struggle. Some of us adults began playing catch with an aerobic (a long-range frisbee with a hole in the middle) around a green. Then a few young people started pitching and batting baseballs, which made the rest of us outfielders. Then the little children wanted in on the action, chasing balls and frisbees, whichever happened to land near them. There was no score, no losers, not even a recognizable game. It was a free-form celebration of God with us, all of us, playing in the sun. But I can go through a lot of struggle after a celebration like that.

Let's not get triumphant, however, and build a tower to life in community. The victory is never won for sure. A marriage is in peril. Volunteers get exhausted. The community welcome grows thin. Failure is always possible, as well as forgiveness. So the struggles and the crises go on within the context of Jesus' love and hope. May God give us the grace to persist in faith until all is recycled for good, both here and in eternity. ☪

Getting Acquainted

God Continues to Call Us

Mark and Louise Stahnke
Plow Creek Fellowship

We had our life well planned out in 1969, the year Mark and I were married. He would finish seminary and become a minister in the United Methodist Church. I would become a proper minister's wife. And we would spend the next forty years in the California conference in a predictable fashion.

Then the Lord came along. First, we learned these roles were not for us. Then I developed lupus, a chronic, eventually fatal illness. And then the Lord took the disease away to show us He was real and powerful. We became part of the quiet charismatic movement. After two years of training and counseling and exposure to the Church of the Redeemer in Houston, Texas, we returned to a pastorate in California. We thought maybe the Lord would revive our church as He had Redeemer. He didn't. We found Jackson's first book *Living Together*, and everything fell into place for us. The call to intentional Christian community answered the need we had for a church life that made sense.

We arrived at Plow Creek in July of 1979 with two young sons and without a previous visit. We became members the following March and have been much blessed by our life here. We came seeking "the right way to be a church," and found a whole realm of relationships to challenge us and enrich our lives. We found extended family to take the place of our original, often painful, family experiences. We walked with others through the challenges of being parents and also dealt with our own flawed parenting skills. The Lord opened doors of healing for childhood abuse we had experienced and provided support from those around us. During the most difficult years in the early 90's, as we wondered if Plow Creek Fellowship would survive, God called us back to Him again as the only One in whom to place our trust. And He continues to call us: to faithfulness, to

service, to learn to trust Him in all things. Blessed be his Holy name!



A Brief Spiritual Autobiography

Douglas Selph
Church of the Sojourners

In 1981 at the University of Santa Cruz, I met Jesus in an InterVarsity Christian Fellowship meeting after experiencing an impressive openness and vulnerability in the Christians there on campus. I felt I had stumbled upon something meaningful to which I could give my life. In terms of the parables, I could be described as the person who, after searching for fine pearls for years, happened upon one that promised to be more valuable than anything else previously encountered. The best my parents had to offer in my growing-up years were the gods of science and cynicism. These gods were good at crushing what was incorrect and silly, but did little to foster dreams that truly inspired and filled the soul, as following Jesus, the source of living water, is so able to do.

Over the following four to five years at Santa Cruz, I felt I truly got to know the sixty-plus believers that were part of the fellowship in those years. With them I discovered what it meant to follow Jesus, shar-

ing both very fun and very hard times. But after college, all the new friends I had made moved on to other places, leaving me feeling alone. I tried attending the local Four Square church for a year or two, and made a few friends, but it was nothing like the richness of fellowship-family life I experienced earlier. And so after a particularly intense period of loneliness, sparked by a rejection of a woman I had attempted to woo, I decided to pack my bags and return home to my parents in a town named El Cerrito, near San Francisco.

The faith I was taught from my university years did little to adequately prepare me for the life of faith I needed after college. I'd been taught to serve Jesus in whatever church you happened to attend, but had no instruction to enable me to discern between the churches that are good places to serve, and those which simply are not. And it turned out that there was a big variety of expressions of faith that I encountered. I finally concluded that the First Baptist Church I had attended for several years was just too lifeless to embody the faith I was looking for. Then I almost became part of the Church of Christ, which was strong on evangelism and discipleship, but they turned out to be far too legalistic, and so God didn't have me there either.

In 1988 I moved into Church of the Sojourners housing and started participating fully in life in community. I tried to learn what it meant to serve Jesus first by seeking to serve Him in the poor. I hoped unity and life together in community would flow from that. But this was not working for us

► **A Brief Spiritual** *cont on p. 6*

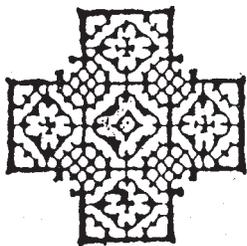


Doug Selph

› **A Brief Spiritual** cont from p.5

at CoS, so by 1991, with the influence of John & Judy Alexander, we started making changes. Over the following five years we learned what it meant to try first to focus on being the Church, loving one another, and building each other up—with ministry flowing out of this. This worked remarkably better for us. In 1995 and 1996 we doubled in size and grew to twenty members.

Then over the next years, I started developing my personal interest in contemplation and prayer. A movement began within myself to focus more on the inward expressions of the faith flowing from prayer, rather than the outward expressions of the faith based in service. And so after several years of seeking, I started practicing the Centering Prayer method as introduced by Thomas Keating. As I progressed and experienced the sweet joys of simply sitting in the presence of Jesus in quiet prayer, I relearned what it means to first seek God and Him alone, and have all other aspects of the faith flow from that. I now look forward to each day as I continue to walk hand in hand with this strange lover Jesus that I still, after all these years, feel like I am just beginning to know.



Ria and Jim Snyder

On a Journey: Jim and Ria

J.B. Smith
Hope Fellowship

They stuck in each other's minds. He was an Iowa boy of twenty-one, a conscientious objector with a military-style buzz haircut. With the Korean War draft under way, he headed to Puerto Rico to do social work with a group of fellow Mennonites. She was a free-spirited Puerto Rican woman of twenty, an aspiring nurse. She lived apart from her family, who had shunned her when she forsook Roman Catholicism for Mennonite beliefs. Jim Snyder and Ria Rivera-Gonzalez were introduced to each other at a wedding on his first night in Puerto Rico, in August 1951. Immediately he suspected that this "island beauty" might be an answer to his bachelor prayers. "Of all the girls I met that night, Ria stood out among the rest of the tribe," Jim says. "Her beauty was radiant."

Ria thought Jim was handsome, though too short. His Spanish impressed her; his buzz cut amused her. Anyway, she had big plans for college and a nursing career on the mainland and couldn't be tied down. She didn't have time for a serious romance. They would have to become friends first. And so they remain, as a married couple four decades later.

Their kids grown and gone, the Snyders are retired in Waco, Texas, spending their

days volunteering and attending Hope Fellowship, living out the values of service, faith and community that drew them together. As Hope's only "ethnic Mennonite"—his Mennonite ancestors hit these shores in the 1730s—Jim is an anchor of Anabaptist tradition in an otherwise non-traditional congregation. Ria, still the same independent-minded woman, leads prayer and Bible study groups, translates for some Hope Fellowship services and works outside the church with abused women.

Like Hope Fellowship itself, the Snyders find richness in the marriage of cultures. Ria says she was pleasantly surprised to find she was accepted by Jim's Midwestern family.

**Ria thought Jim
was handsome,
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His Spanish
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amused her.**

Jim says Ria opened up to him a new world of language, culture and cuisine—avocados and papayas were new to him. They married in Chicago in 1956, five years after they first met. They had kept up their relationship by correspondence during long periods of separation, as he worked at the Mennonite project in Puerto Rico and she attended Goshen College. His proposal of marriage came by U.S. mail. She accepted.

Their marriage would endure other separations over the years. His jobs as YMCA administrator and later as a respiratory therapy administrator took him to Venezuela, Spain, Columbia and Massachusetts. Sometimes, she went with him; sometimes she couldn't. "Distance does have a way of making the heart grow fonder," Jim said. "When you're away, it reinforces those things that first drew you to someone."

In 1988, the Snyders moved to Waco, where Jim worked at a hospital. The Snyders went to a Mennonite church in Austin until 1994, when they decided to check out Hope Fellowship in their own town of Waco. In time, they made the decision to join the small fellowship. "In my first four years at Hope, I thought more about my Mennonite faith than in the previous forty," Jim said. "I took my own religion for granted."

› **On a Journey** cont on p.7



Penny and David Lukens

› *On a Journey* cont from p. 6

Ria said she, too, has found something special at Hope. “To me it’s been refreshing,” Ria said. “I don’t like stagnation. What I’ve found at Hope is a group of people on a journey. A journey of faith, love and support. To me that’s discipleship. Of course, it’s early, and we’re still growing.”



David and Penny Lukens: A Curious Couple

Sara Belser
Reba Place Fellowship

Newly nestled in Reba’s freshest household live David and Penny Lukens, a spunky couple in their sixties. After twenty years in Reba Place Fellowship, they have finally created the opportunity to make a home with others, sharing meals, time and living space with four cats, three housemates, a wider small group, and large numbers of visitors—sometimes twenty or more at one time. “The idea of household living was something we wanted ever since we joined the Fellowship,” David recounts in his pen-

sive philosophy-professor’s tone, “but it hasn’t happened for us before now.”

Penny, a dark-eyed, short-haired Ten Thousand Villages store manager sits at the dining room table with us, mulling over her life with David for the past forty-or-so years. “We were first baptized in the Holy Spirit when we were living in Africa,” she relates. “We were missionaries in Liberia; David taught in a church mission. He was sick of colleges that think of faith as something you invent for yourself. He wanted a Christian college, and we found it, plus we found a vision of Christian community. The faculty there cared for each other and made us realize the importance of close-knit relationships. There we also began praying out loud. One woman received the Holy Spirit while praying for her husband’s trousers!”

David recounts the difficulties he experienced during a year as college chaplain when he had to lead required chapel services for students who didn’t want to be there. “I could feel the hostility radiating. I realized the only person whose worship I could control was mine, and if I wasn’t worshipping, I couldn’t expect others to worship. During that year I learned the need for faithfulness and obedience.”

Penny adds, “There was a Lutheran missionary, and she was enormously dynamic and energetic; she could get people to do things just the way Linas does at Reba.” She describes the beginning of their weekly prayer list, a custom picked up from this missionary. The Lukens keep a “great big notebook of different missionaries, marriages

and so on” which they pray for regularly on different days of the week. “I think of us as intercessors,” Penny concludes.

“How did you meet and come to a common sense of life direction?” I ask them.

“I realized the only person whose worship I could control was mine, and if I wasn’t worshipping, I couldn’t expect others to worship.”

“We didn’t come to a common sense,” Penny states. “We met in church at an Episcopal worship and fellowship time for students. We were both in the choir, and we became the people who buy the doughnuts. We decided to get married. We did whatever David would do—it was assumed you go where your husband goes. Going to Liberia and then Toronto were career moves for David. We probably process our decisions more fully now than we used to. Coming to Evanston was a common decision.”

David declares, “Both a charismatic prayer group in Toronto and the missionary experience in Liberia prepared us to recognize that what we need and want is community.”

Before they came to Reba, their neighbors, friends and fellow church members were completely different sets of people. Reba was just the opposite: here these groups are one. Now that David and Penny’s four children are grown and living on their own, the Lukens have settled in Cana Household at 727 Reba Place. “We’re happy and excited about living here,” they profess. They enjoy working together with other members of the household and helping each other. There’s something satisfying for them in the dovetailing that happens there, in the sing-a-longs they host, the food distribution ministry across the alley in which they serve, and many other efforts. It’s the combined effort that satisfies their spirits. “We would never be able to do all these things alone.”

However, David observes, “The price of sharing the joys is sharing all the sorrows and pains. We have to get used to sharing so that when we get to heaven, and God asks us to tell about our lives, we’re used to opening up. We can’t do it on our own, but with Jesus’ help we can.” ④

› **Latter Day Saints** *cont from p.2*

teachers in religious education at Westminster College of Oxford. I worked very hard for three exciting years. The experience confirmed how much I love teaching. During these years we made contact again with Alan Kreider and the London Mennonite Fellowship. The witness of the Anabaptist movement continued to grow in importance to me and informs my understanding of the church and of Christian discipleship. In 1998 I obtained a job as Coordinator of Peace and Justice Ministries at the RLDS headquarters in Independence, Missouri. The timing is significant to me. In 1984 the RLDS received prophetic guidance to ordain women and to build a temple to peace in Independence. This marked a new direction for the denomination.

I think there can be no deep peace and justice in our world without the Kingdom of God being expressed through Christian intentional communities, difficult as that journey may be.

I saw that Anabaptists could be a partner in our RLDS development as a peace church. I have made connections with other Mennonite teachers, especially Jim Juhnke [who teaches at Bethel College in North Newton, Kansas] and his brother Bill Juhnke

What would it mean for Christians to bear good news to folks like these given the legacy of crusades, colonialism and the holocaust?

[a history professor at Graceland, our denomination's college in Iowa]. We give out an annual international peace prize. This year it was awarded to the Mennonite mediation theorist and trainer, John Paul Lederach. I have written on Anabaptism in our church journal. I believe the resulting exchanges with Mennonites have been a fresh blessing in both directions.

It was quite healing for me and many others that I came back and took the job in Peace and Justice Ministries. My time in the wilderness, after being fired from full-time ministry, has borne fruit. The pluralism that I learned about while teaching at Leicester is symbolic of our whole world. But peace and

reconciliation need living examples. I think there can be no deep peace and justice in our world without the Kingdom of God being expressed through Christian intentional communities, difficult as that journey may be.

After some struggle, our family chose



to live in Harvest Hills, the only RLDS intentional community. Harvest Hills had its beginning in 1957 when people began talking about a living community expressing the kingdom of God. Ten years later they said, "We have talked about it long enough!"

By now there are fifty-five houses, most of them encircling a common green. Originally, all were RLDS members; but since then some have left and sold their houses or become absentee landlords. People have moved in without the same commitment. But there is still a group that hopes for a deeper community commitment. I really enjoy the old folks at Harvest Hills, people who are still radical and believe in Zion. They are like my spiritual parents. I believe Christian intentional communities need each other. Your book *Fire, Salt, and Peace* was exciting to us for this reason. We wanted people who've lived community to come and speak to us. That is why we are visiting Reba this weekend. We are hungry to learn. You could see that today in our conversations. The struggle for us right now at Harvest Hills is to clarify whether we will have a common treasury and who will be the core of committed people. We started the Zion Seminars again in 1998.

Allan Howe [from Reba Place Fellowship] came to speak to us at the 1999 Zion Seminar and people found it very helpful. I was keen to follow up with a visit to Reba which is why fourteen of us are here this weekend. We wanted to see your corporate reality. Driving 600 miles together in a minibus is also a time for important fellowship. Now it's not just Andrew Bolton who has these crazy ideas about the importance of Anabaptism and the Mennonite testimony of community. Other people have seen for

themselves, have been touched here and really feel something.

A history of community to build on and some disasters, too

We in RLDS have a history of community to build on and some disasters, too. Our story goes back to the 1830s and building communities in Kirtland (Ohio), Independence and Far West (Missouri), and then at Nauvoo (Illinois) in the 1840s, where Joseph Smith gathered thousands of people to create the new Jerusalem. I see this experience of Nauvoo as the equivalent of Muenster for the Anabaptists. At Nauvoo they instituted polygamy and mustered a militia of 3,000 men, which soon met with violent opposition. Joseph Smith was assassinated. They were not destroyed like the Anabaptists at Munster, however. Brigham Young escaped west with several thousand people into the Utah Territory.

But a remnant stayed behind and regrouped, rejecting polygamy and the idea of a militant community. They became the Reorganized Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints led by one of the sons of Joseph Smith. Since our beginning, we have been open to influence and exchange with other Protestant churches. But now that we are exploring being a peace church, we need a similar openness to Anabaptism. Many are ready to give it a hearing.

Our church seal depicts a lion, a lamb and a little child leading them--reminiscent of Isaiah, and of Edward Hicks's painting "The Peaceable Kingdom." I recently wrote a denominational study guide on the Sermon on the Mount and it sold out. At the same time, many of our members have accommodated to American culture, are devoted to military careers and to capitalism. For them non-violence and intentional community can appear as a real threat.

I sense that my story is like that of Joseph, who was rejected by his brothers, yet allowed himself to become an instrument of their salvation. I don't take this egotistically because, in part, my rejection was because of my own arrogance, but God has used the difficult circumstances of my life for a purpose. I am perhaps a missionary to the Americans. I know the age of imperial power for the U.S. will pass, like it did for Britain. Some of us are willing to speak about Zion again. I think a time of revival is coming to Harvest Hills and in our denomination. We still believe that if we repent, follow Jesus, share all things in common and practice justice, Zion will come. ©

First Chicago L'Arche

David Hovde is first assistant in the new home

David Hovde
L'Arche Chicago

Learning about God's love at L'Arche:

When I came to the Arch a year and a half ago, I didn't know what to expect. I wanted to spend time in a L'Arche community because I wanted to be part of L'Arche Chicago when it formed. I am a member of a Christian community in Evanston, Illinois, called Reba Place Fellowship. While living in Evanston, I worked four years for Neighborhood Services, where I assisted several developmentally disabled men in small group homes.

I thought that being part of L'Arche would bring together life in Christian community with the work I was doing. Jean Vanier's books drew me to the vision of L'Arche, but I never had visited a L'Arche community and didn't know how the communities lived

out this vision.

At the Arch, I experienced God's love in many ways: mealtimes together, community prayer, celebrations, meetings, welcoming many visitors, and daily work routines. The affection of the core members through touch and loving words comes from their hearts and teaches me about God's love. I'm learning that the spirit in which we do things for others is more important than our abilities. My care for the core members through assisting them in basic tasks also reminds me that God's love for us doesn't depend on our abilities. Our abilities are gifts God gives us to bring joy to others and ourselves.

Gift of a home: Last October Jean Vanier spoke in Chicago to help advance L'Arche's efforts to open a home. In the Chicago Tribune, reporter David Heinzmann, friend of a former Clinton, Iowa, Arch assistant, wrote an article about Jean's visit and the L'Arche movement. The article inspired California resident Kathleen Rivet, who heard about L'Arche for the first time in that article. She offered L'Arche Chicago's Director, Sr. Maria Zeimen, a six-bedroom two-flat house in Chicago rent-free for one year, with the option to buy. She did this because she had always wished her two sons with disabilities could have lived in a community like L'Arche.

I am moving into L'Arche Chicago's

new home at the end of April to be an assistant. Arlene Boezak hoped to be another assistant, but has become seriously ill with cancer. [ed: Arlene died on May 10.] Maria, the Director, will also serve as an assistant for awhile. Elbert Lott, from the Chicago area, will be the first core member. Laura Bowers, who first visited the Arch with a student group from St. Louis University, plans to become a resident assistant in June. We expect at least three other core members to join us soon.

Grace to live the vision: I am amazed at how many people have given money, effort and prayer so that we can begin in Chicago. We feel drawn toward the vision of L'Arche. May God give us the grace to live out this vision. ©

For the past eighteen months, Reba member David Hovde has lived in The Arch, a L'Arche community, in Clinton, Iowa. Now he is the first assistant of the new L'Arche community founded in Chicago. L'Arche lives the vision of a common life shared between core members (persons with developmental disabilities) and assistants. In recent years, Reba members have given support to the creation of a new L'Arche community in Chicago. The preceeding article was adapted from an article in The Arch (Clinton, Iowa) newsletter.

El Salvador

**From my perch in the top of a tree
I peer through the branches and see
the countryside lying still,
baking in the hot sun,
knowing that the blood has run in the Lempa
and fed parched soil.**

**My tears evaporate as they fall to the ground
And blood stays locked in my veins.
Maybe my cries, reaching up to heaven,
will unlock some door,
And rain will fall and breezes blow
To stir the seed
and make the harvest happen.**

THE EL SALVADORANS

*I touched their suffering body
and stood still
In awe of sinewy strength
and a round joy.*

Two poems
by Lois Engelman
Reba Place Fellowship

Church News

News from San Francisco

Jack Bernard
Church of the Sojourners

Life is going on normally here at Church of the Sojourners in spite having sent the Alexanders off to Southern California on a special pastoral mission, and various others of us making regular trips to encourage and support them. As reported in the last issue, we are providing pastoral support for a group of people left in disarray by the breakup of Church of the Servant King in Gardena. At least some of them would like to see some form of church reformed out of the wreckage, but it is not yet clear if that will happen or what it will look like if it does. The big spiritual issues are trust and forgiveness. This is quite understandable given the collapse of the community to which they had given so much of their lives.

One of the ministries we consider an expression of our purpose as a congregation is calling other Christians to take the church seriously as a central part of God's plan for redeeming the universe. To that end, we occasionally host weekend seminars on the nature and purpose of the church. In May we held such a seminar which was attended by 35 people. During that time we housed, fed and taught the participants. Hopefully we taught not only by means of the seminars

but through our personal relationship and hospitality as well. Some of the participants, such as several people from San Diego, came because they are considering the possibility of starting a community. Others were simply serious Christians wanting to consider how they should be a part of God's church. One couple, Dave and Jenny Lockie from Montana, are the parents of Tim Lockie who is currently a novice member of Church of the Sojourners. They were primarily wanting a better understanding of what their son is up to in being part of this strange church in San Francisco. They seem to have gone away encouraged.

Our congregation recognizes young people transitioning from a child's relationship to the church into an adult relationship by an event we call Rites of Passage. As this is being written, Ian Creeger (16) is in process of this. He is in Mexico experiencing a time of service and reflection with Dan Zazvorka and Tim Lockie as guides. Three of our other five teenagers, Jaime and Hannah Zazvorka and Matt Creeger, have already undergone parallel versions of this event and it seems to be one of our home-made traditions which bears good fruit. Jaime and Matt have also just graduated from high school this month, and Michelle Somers graduated from middle school.

We are looking forward to our Summer Sojourn again this year. This is our summer program in which we invite young people to live with us for the summer as interns in church community and service. This year we are trying a different format. We are hoping it will provide more of an experience of normal adult life in church community than the youth-focused program it has been

in the past. We are very encouraged that the ten interns who are coming this summer are coming for that specific reason. Among the interns we are expecting are two from other SMC member churches, Sara Belser from Reba, and Gabriela Gatlin from Hope Community.

Eighty percent of our congregation is planning to attend the SMC conference this summer and we are hoping to see many of you there.



News from Waco

Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Fellowship/Hope Community

Life has been full the past few months. We celebrated the birth of Clare Marie Bridgewater, daughter of Barbara and Phillip on February 28! Also in February, Ruth Boardman-Alexander was part of a visitation team to Plow Creek and was blessed to learn more about the way in which brothers and sisters there are living and showing God's love to one another.

In early May, Hope Fellowship hosted a one-day retreat at World Hunger Relief Farm for Mid-Texas Mennonites. The theme was "Breaking Down the Dividing Wall of Hostility." We feel it was an important time in the life of the churches in our area because there was participation from both Spanish- and English-speaking congregations, and it truly seemed a time of learning to open ourselves to each other. Gilberto Flores, Hispanic conference minister, was the powerful speaker for this event.

We are in a time of discernment about leadership roles within the church, praying that God will call out people in various areas of ministry (Worship, Evangelism, Fellowship, Stewardship, Discipleship). We continue to explore what Hope Fellowship's roles and relationships with those outside the local body should look like, among them Hope Fellowship's relationship with Shalom Missions Communities. We have a meeting planned in June to discuss this topic more fully.

We have two families who are visiting Hope Fellowship regularly, one of whom is considering membership.

We anticipate several major happenings



Anne Gavitt

this summer. The Boardman-Alexanders are expecting a baby in June. [Ed.: A healthy Evan Boardman Alexander was born on June 18, weighing 7 lb 9 oz, at 21" long!] In late June, Gabriela Gatlin will head to San Francisco for the Summer Sojourn. At that same time, Nancy, Joe and Anafí Gatlin will leave for several weeks in South America (accompanied by Hannah Zazvorka from Church of the Sojourners). In July, the Boardman-Alexanders will move from 1700 Morrow to 1712 Morrow, a house they are purchasing. In late August, Chad and Shayna Pollock will leave Waco and soon after head to China to teach English there for a year.

Please keep us in your prayers as we continue to keep you in ours. God bless you!



News from Tiskilwa: A Letter from the Masts

Wesley and Elaine Mast
Plow Creek Fellowship

Dear Friends and Family,

Disheveled rooms and stardust on the floors from which beds and bureaus have been moved do convince us that, yes, we are moving next week. After having lived at Plow Creek almost 26 years to the day, we are taking a 15 month sabbatical to Pennsylvania and plan again to return here in the fall of 2001. For the present, Elsie has tests to give and grades to enter on Tuesday, then we leave on Wednesday.

I (Wesley) have terminated the work with Gateway Center (caring for developmentally disabled) and will work the final day as chaplain at Methodist Medical center on Sunday. The concrete plans are to move next week, and I will take a concentrated eight-week training at St. Luke's Hospital, Bethlehem, PA in Clinical Pastoral Training. I will likely say yes to an offer to start a one-year Clinical Pastoral Training program in Williamsport, PA, which begins in August. The interview will be on our way to PA next Friday, June 2nd, and the deadline for the response is June 3rd!

We want, during the year, to attend family reunions and connect with our families as we have opportunity. Elsie already

has a trip planned to Virginia with her sister Lucille and Aunt Kathryn to visit relatives there. Her aunt in Harrisonburg, VA, is terminally ill.

We were graced last Friday by a generous adieu from friends at Plow Creek, and were given a scrapbook of stories, poems, drawings, and letters. Even though we plan to return and I have a job offering, there is a finality with leaving that is far greater than the reality of being away for 15 months. It is a tremendous gift to us to be able to turn over many tasks of worship leading, teaching, pastoring, digging graves, and organizing meals to others at Plow Creek. The new life here is like a wellspring, with colorful fountains.

Pray for us that we could learn what the Lord has for us in this time, that we may have teachable spirits, that we would grow in love for each other, and that the next era of our lives, after farming and teaching school, would be formed around what God wants. Thanks to each of you for being part of our journey.

Grace and Peace,
Wesley and Elsie



News Flash from Cincinnati

Kevin Rains
Community House

Community House has received confirmation that they are officially recognized by the IRS as a 501(d) organization. After a long and confusing ride they finally got what they applied for well over a year ago!

[Ed.: A 501(d) is an "Apostolic Order" classification for IRS and allows the community to share the taxes of their common businesses among all the members—which is a form that fits the way they already function. This 501(d) classification is used by Reba Place Fellowship, Plow Creek Fellowship, the Bruderhof and certain common-treasury Catholic orders. In the 1980s New Creation Fellowship in Newton, Kansas, and Fellowship of Hope in Elkhart, Indiana, had their 501(d) applications disallowed after many years of operating under its provisions. For quite a few years, we'd heard, IRS was not allowing any new "Apostolic Orders," so this recognition by the IRS

is unusual and is a good encouragement and confirmation of what Community House is up to.]



News from Evanston & Chicago

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

On June 7 Reba Place Fellowship broke new ground by commissioning Greg Clark as our new spiritual leader—a role that has not existed in the Fellowship for at least a couple of decades. We celebrated this moment in our life with a great feast. Greg Clark led us in seven toasts—to the past, present, and future, to Jesus, to feasting, fellowship and friends. Greg plans to spend the summer listening to members before he suggests any new directions. We are energized by this new beginning. Lisa Blackwood and David Janzen constitute a leadership support group for Greg. They are called the LDG until a more inspired name finds us.

Sara Belser has left for five weeks to serve and learn as a Summer Sojourner with Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco.

We are looking forward to hosting the Shalom Connections Conference August 4-6 when we hope to connecting with many old friends and some new communities as well. One of the old friends will be our speaker, Richard Hays, of the Duke University Divinity School.

Reba Church in Evanston has taken a big step by adding Pam Sullivan and Ric Hudgens to the pastoral team of Virgil Vogt and George Providence. We feel inspired by this team's diversity of gifts, experience, and ethnic background. Our challenge is to have faith that, as a church community, we can find support for this many ministers as they work to equip all the rest of us for ministry in the neighborhood.

The Rogers Park congregation, which began as a colony of Reba Place Church in Evanston, has come of age with a new name to show it—Living Water Community Church. 

God's One-Item Agenda

A Book Review

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

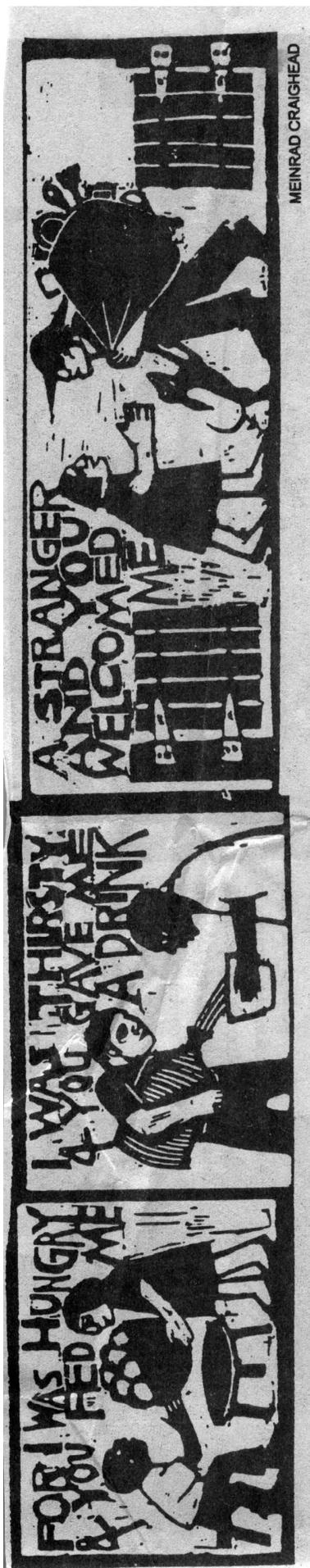
Samuel George Hines and Curtiss Paul DeYoung, *Beyond Rhetoric: Reconciliation as a Way of Life* (Judson Press, 1999).

A Church focused on Reconciliation:

“God has a one-item agenda listed in one expressive and inclusive word: *reconciliation*.” Reconciliation was the passion of Rev. Samuel George Hines, a black Jamaican-born pastor for twenty-five years of the 3rd Street Church of God in Washington, D.C. This book includes a collection of Hines’ stirring sermons in which he elaborates a Biblical theology of reconciliation as it relates to race, gender, economics, and all the other historic ways that sin has divided the human race and separated us from God.

This book goes beyond rhetoric for me especially in the sixth chapter when Rev. Hines describes the deliberate steps he was led to take in transforming a close-knit traditional African-American congregation. He began by teaching reconciliation and leading the congregation to pray for reconciliation in the expectation that something new would happen. It did. He moved on to forge a network of interracial partnerships with other congregations—and within the church itself—based upon sincere personal relationships and costly forgiveness in the example of Jesus. And with these partnerships a wide range of wholistic ministries grew up that treated all issues of oppression (whether spiritual, social or material) as God’s concern and the work of the church community.

An Interracial Partnership: The co-author of this book is Curtiss Paul DeYoung, a white Christian activist of Dutch Reform stock, who came under Rev. Hines’ discipleship, and eventually shared leadership with him as a assistant pastor. In pulling this book together after Rev. Hines’ death in 1995, DeYoung contributes several reconciliation case studies by looking at the cross-cultural partnerships in the early church and in the beginning of the 20th century Charismatic



movement in the United States. He also writes insightfully about how the message of reconciliation must engage the cultural experience and context of the audience that is addressed. The ministry of reconciliation requires that we not only catch God’s passion for befriending enemies, but we enter into the experience of others with genuine relationships and unbiased partnerships to make this real.

Economic Reconciliation—A Miracle of the Early Church: I found in this book a solid case for claiming *reconciliation* as the central and unifying theme of the Gospel. This is the heart of Paul’s manifesto in II Corinthians 5: 16-21 which describes God’s work in Christ reconciling us to himself and making us ambassadors of reconciliation. Reconciliation is the heart of personal salvation, social ministry and community—dimensions of one reality often separated by polarizing controversies.

As an intentional Christian community member, I was interested to see what these authors might have to say about economics. I was not disappointed. Curtiss DeYoung writes about the Jerusalem Church as follows:

“The community of the reconciled nurtured and sustained their faith through a discipline that included the apostles teaching, fellowship, the breaking of bread, and prayer (Acts 2:42). The church in Jerusalem experienced boldness in their witness and miracles in their daily lives as a result of this devotion to God. One of the miracles was an amazing economic reconciliation. ‘All who believed were together and had all things in common... and no one claimed private ownership... There was not a needy person among them.’”

Since reading this passage the expression “economic reconciliation” has stuck with me and become a most useful way of expressing the motive and the witness power of our shared economics. “Economic reconciliation” fits and completes the witness, reflecting the reconciliation we have been given in Christ for relationships, genders, generations, races, and with enemies. Seeking such wholeness is our reason for being and being together, however difficult and however imperfect the results. This is where we find Jesus, and this is why wholeness is holy. Ⓢ

› **Visiting Friends** *cont from p.1*

gives me hope. In the dramas they satirized themselves and the funny things (to them) that Americans do when they visit. It really seemed healthy. Salome, who visited Plow Creek last summer, participated in the drama. We also received an update on the various projects we, and some of you, have helped to support. Fifty families benefited from the corn and beans project for the poorest in the village, to help them until the next harvest.

Following our days in Valle Nuevo we went to San Salvador for the 20th anniversary of Oscar Romero's assassination. What really stood out for me was an ecumenical event that included Protestant churches from around the world, expressing the impact Romero had on them. I was surprised at this. Through this event I came to appreciate a lot more the significance of Romero's preaching, which was so centered on Jesus as our example, whose gospel called the church to stand with the poor, while at the same time seeking not to disregard the wealthy. His preaching, which was broadcast on radio throughout El Salvador, did lead to his assassination when he told the soldiers to follow the law of God above their commanders and stop killing people. My sense is his life example has generated a real spirit of revival of the gospel in many churches, both Catholic and Protestant. The singing sounded like a Mennonite or Brethren conference, very different from ordinary conservative Catholic mass that we experienced there. They even sang one song we sing at Plow Creek, *Colors*.



Maura (holding umbrella) and Manuel (far right) Portillo and family from Honduras, join Jim Fitz (2nd from right) across the Rio Lempa for the March 18 commemoration.

In closing, I want to share a poem from Archbishop Romero.

**Prophets of a Future
Not Our Own**

It helps, now and then, to step back
and take the long view.
The kingdom is not only beyond our
efforts,
it is beyond our vision.

We accomplish in our lifetime only a tiny
fraction
of the magnificent enterprise that is God's
work.
This is another way of saying
that the kingdom always lies beyond us.

No statement says all that could be said.
No prayer expresses fully our faith.
No confession brings perfection.
No pastoral visit wholeness.
No program accomplishes the church's mis-
sion.
No set of goals and objectives includes
everything.

This is what we are about:
We plant seeds that one day will grow.
We water seeds already planted,
knowing that they hold future prom-
ise.
We lay foundations that will need future
development.
We provide yeast that produces effects
beyond our capabilities.



Salome, of
Valle Nuevo, El Salvador

We cannot do everything
and there is a sense of liberation in
realizing that.
This enables us to do something,
and do it very well.
It may be incomplete, but it is the begin-
ning, a step along the way,
an opportunity for God's grace to enter and
do the rest.

We may never see the end results,
but that is the difference between the
master builder and the worker.
We are workers, not master builders,
ministers, not messiahs.
We are prophets of future not our own.
Amen.

God's blessing on you this day!
Jim



Fourteen people traveled from Plow Creek and Reba to Valle Nuevo, El Salvador this spring, from March 17-25. The delegation was lead by Yvonne Dilling and Jim Fitz.

This article was excerpted from a letter from Jim Fitz to a circle of friends regarding his trip there. Used with permission.



Chris
Evans

A rejection slip for the Bible

“Needs re-write” say Eds.

Rich Foss
Plow Creek Fellowship

If the Bible were submitted as a manuscript today, most religious publishers would send it back with a rejection slip. Too much sex. Too much violence.

That's the opinion of a longtime editor of our denomination's magazine.

My wife has one of those “Read the Bible In a Year” versions. Every so often she reads me one of the parts that most preachers skip over. “I can't believe that's in the Bible,” she'll say.

Once she read me the story of Dinah's brothers who took revenge for the rape of their sister. They persuaded the men of the offending village to be circumcised and then massacred them while they were recovering from surgery.

That's tough reading. But I'm glad such

stories are in the Bible. And it's not because I think revenge is a good thing.

I'm glad the Bible includes brutally honest stories because sometimes life is brutal. Women are raped. The men who love them get enraged.

When life turns brutal it's easy to feel like an outcast. When I was sixteen I suddenly became severely disabled with rheumatoid arthritis. I spent six months of my senior year of high school in the hospital. When I got out I had scars, limped and often used a wheelchair. Total strangers felt free to come up to me and ask me, “What's your problem?”

Once when I was in college I had a friend who was Muslim from Pakistan. When he and I decided to room together in the dorm, some other guys in the dorm said, “Jamal, you must be sick to want to room with a cripple.”

I felt like an outcast to the human race. The Bible is full of stories of people who were outcasts.

There's the story of the man who was so mentally ill he hung around the cemetery totally naked. Jesus befriended him, got him calmed down and into some clothes. Now that sounds like a simple, nice story. But

stories in the Bible are rarely simple and nice.

When the man calmed down, a nearby herd of hogs went crazy and ran off a cliff and drowned in the nearest lake. The people of the nearby village came out and asked Jesus to move on because, even though their neighbor had rejoined the human race, they had lost their hogs.

Life does get mixed up. The three women listed in Jesus' genealogy in the Gospel of Matthew all started out as outcasts. The first was a prostitute, the second was a foreigner and the third was an adulterer.

Jesus got into trouble for hanging out with prostitutes. I'm sure he didn't frequent them but he did befriend them and he caught grief for it. He looked at the good people who were giving him a hard time and said, “It's not the healthy who need a doctor but the sick.”

I like the Bible. It has stories of sick people. And some of them get better. ©

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Rich Foss is a pastoral elder of Plow Creek Church and his novel, Jonas and Sally, will be coming out in paperback in June.

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