

Some Competencies of Community Membership

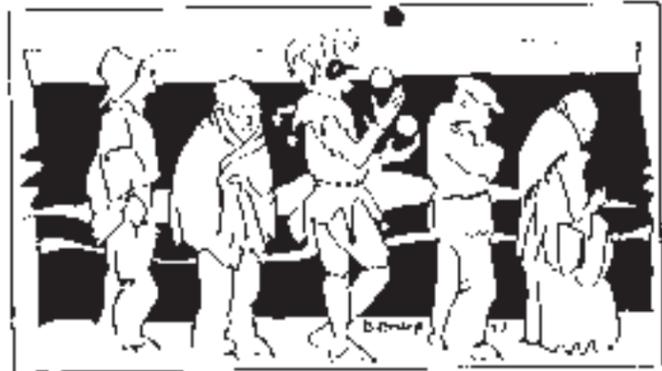
Ronn Frantz

Reba Place Fellowship, Rodgers Park

- Stick around a while and you'll likely learn to:
- Hear the Lord for yourself
- Cook a meal for twenty persons
- Balance a check book
- Understand the concept of communal accounting and legal structures
- Work as a team
- Facilitate a meeting
- Organize a workday
- Identify your feelings
- Understand the distinctions possible in consensus decision making
- Carry responsibilities designed primarily to

- meet someone else's needs
- Check the oil, transmission fluid, power steering fluid, washer fluid and air pressure of a vehicle
- Listen to a child
- Be comfortable by yourself
- Pray for someone in distress
- Share how God is present in your life
- Learn another language
- State what you want and be able to distinguish that from what you need
- Develop a cross-cultural relationship
- Practice hospitality
- Paint a room
- Pack for a move
- Develop an artistic expression
- Be silent

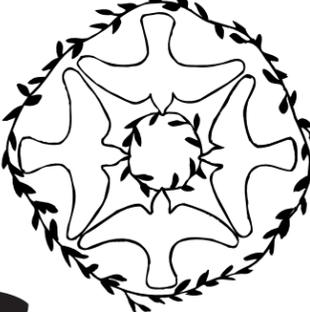
- Clearly and lovingly state a concern to another person
- Submit to authority
- Exercise authority
- Plunge a toilet
- Change a diaper
- Listen to the elderly
- Become biblically literate
- Renounce possessions and power
- Extend and receive forgiveness from the heart
- Live with disappointment without pouting
- Empower others
- Talk while working
- Encourage and affirm others
- Wash dishes to someone else's satisfaction. ☺



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The Kingdom of Self and the People of God

An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

The sound of a drum-beat and eerie trilling voices carried through the night, inviting us to walk across the school grounds and join students in an impromptu jam session. These *soirées amusantes* are some of our most vivid memories from the years Joanne and I lived in the Congo (1967-69).

Soirées would begin with a high school talent show. But after all the set pieces, someone would launch out in a steady beat on a cowhide drum. Others would join with a variety of noisemakers—rocks rattled in a tin can, a “bush piano” plinked with both thumbs, a stick playing a gourd marimba, hand clapping, and more. All these sounds gradually blended and grew into increasingly intricate and rich rhythmic patterns. Soon children were dancing, limbs responding to the different beats. Older women expressed their joy in uvular trills that raised goose bumps up and down my back. The music went on and on without much change, individuals dropping out and others joining, sometimes lasting half the night.

We asked our students if they found this musical experience



monotonous. “Oh no,” they replied, “That is just the way we love it.” The reason for their joy, we eventually discerned, is that the goal was not excellence of novelty and individual performance, but an excellence achieved by all participants in finding the same groove and subtly exploring it. These soirées gave everyone an experience of the common spirit, a healing of the tensions from academic competition and Western ways, a celebration of unity. Such “music” could only happen in a society where individuals expect to find their meaning in the group rather than in their personal emancipation and glory.

Most people, most times and places on the earth have been part of traditional societies that would find our individualistic western civilization

deeply disturbing. Traditional communal societies are not better than the way Americans live, but they are fundamentally different in the role of the self.

When everyone suffers together: Selfishness is part of our fallen human condition—present in any society. We compensate for our hurts by placing ourselves at the center of concern and by giving ourselves more credit than we deserve. In a traditional village, the necessity of community for survival usually held the forces of human selfishness in check. But there is a truth deeper than survival carried in the African proverb: “When everyone suffers together, the individual does not suffer.”

One hundred years ago most Americans lived in rural communities where people borrowed freely and worked without compen-

› *The Kingdom of Self* cont on p.11

Community House Wrecking

Stu Clark

Grain of Wheat Church Community

WINNIPEG: Life in community is highly unpredictable—a little like Prairie weather. The unexpected is always just around the corner to cause crises... and to provide opportunities.

In early October 2000, James and Camille Neufeld, recently departed Grain of Wheat members, purchased a house from another Grain of Wheat member. The night after the first owner moved out, an arsonist set an old chair on the porch alight and by 2 am the front of the house was engulfed in flames. The fire department was called out and managed to stop the fire but not before extensive damage was done to the interior of the house. Early estimates put the damage at close to the price that the Neufelds had paid for the house.

Tragedies like this tend to bring out the best in community. The following Saturday about 15 GoW members turned out to tear out the porch and the interior of the house in preparation for the reconstruction. It was dirty disheartening work—the damage from

a fire is so complete and it took such a small but intentional act to make it happen. Still, many plates of cookies and coffee later most of the removal of the burnt interior was completed.

By relying on lower losses due to the good stewardship and integrity of the participants, MAU has been able to provide help in event of property loss at a cost significantly lower than conventional insurance.

The Neufelds were insured by Mennonite Aid Union (MAU), an inter-Mennonite self insurance system that was developed as an alternative to commercially operated insurance companies. By relying on lower losses due to the good stewardship and integrity of the participants, MAU has been able to provide help in event of property loss at a cost significantly lower than conventional insurance.

Unknown to us, the MAU director responsible for Manitoba visited the house while Grain of Wheat was busy with the cleanup. This set in motion a series of events that may affect many members of community... and the broader constituency of Mennonite Aid Union.

A month or so after the Neufeld house fire and cleanup, Arthur Driedger, the MAU director present that day, approached Grain of Wheat leadership to ask if the community would be interested to become a part of Mennonite Aid Union. As Grain of Wheat is not a part of any Mennonite conference, this represented somewhat of an exception to the usual MAU policy. A meeting in January between officials of MAU and members of the Economics of Love Seed Group (a GoW mission group looking for practical ideas from the "Economy of Love") led to a proposal for GoW to become affiliated with the MAU. The following are some of the proposed parts of this application:

- Members and adherents of Grain of Wheat wishing to take out coverage with Mennonite Aid Union will be recommended by the leadership of the community. This will allow us to include both members

and adherents while respecting the desire of MAU to include those with a demonstrated commitment to an Anabaptist church.

- Grain of Wheat will commit to work together to provide any sweat equity needed to defray the cost of repairing damage and to help meet any of the deductible portion of the cost for losses incurred by its members.

There are certainly other situations where MAU members are helped by their churches during a crisis. However, our application, which includes these commitments



by the church community, is seen as a continuation of the Old Order Mennonite barn raising practices. By reasserting the principles which originally gave rise to the MAU, other participating churches may be inspired to do likewise. ©

› *The Kingdom of Self* cont from p.1 sation for the extended family. Fifty years ago the average American lived in an urban nuclear family of mother, father and three kids. Today most children are born into single-parent families or can expect to live a significant period of their lives in such a condition.

The push of market capitalism is to multiply our individual needs and to divide us into an increasing number of consumption units. Jacque Ellul has reminded us that as technology takes over more of our lives, its tools channel us into solo activities. Sex, in our media-driven culture, no longer serves as a celebration of intimacy and commitment in life, but rather has become a way to meet people and move on.

The Enlightenment-born right of "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness" has increased our options as well as disparities of poverty and wealth. Over time we see the systematic weakening of all communal structures between the individual and the powers that drive the media, nation states, market capitalism and technology.

Stepping outside our culture: Living in the Congo enabled Joanne and me to step outside our culture, and in so doing, made us seekers of more intentional community. Our time in the Congo also helped us see the Bible with new eyes, recognizing how much recent Western Christianity has spiritualized and individualized the communal character of Judaism, the teaching of Jesus, and the corporate nature of early church. Careful group Bible study, like the 16th Century Anabaptists did, is another way to get an outside view of the dominant culture.

Recently, on a Sunday morning at Reba we were singing a song whose chorus repeated "Mine, mine, mine. Victory is mine." This expresses the joy of an individual freed from sin. But it also illustrates how the kingdom of self has replaced the kingdom of God in the church. This song, like many we sing, is about an individualistic version of salvation that would deeply dismay African Christians—and the Apostle Paul. (See Romans 12, I Corinthians 12:12-13)

They would ask: Can a baby give itself birth or survive without a community? How do I become human except as I am known

and loved? Why does God give us spiritual gifts and material resources? Do I have life apart from a people? Of course not, they would answer.

Rather, Jesus died to save lost "me's" into a new "we." In this "we" all clans and traditional factions die to self and are reconciled in a new corporate life. Unique personalities and cultures find their fulfillment in the Body of Christ. Persons with a prior formation in community understand this in a way that individualistically-formed Christians do not.

To put this insight into a modern idiom, Christians are like basketball players. As an individual you can practice some moves, but without a team, you can only pretend to be a basketball player. Salvation is getting accepted onto the team—and that is where the learning begins. There is no place for "victory is mine!" Following Jesus is a team sport.

For those who hear the call of Jesus to discipleship community, we have a real uphill battle. The Kingdom of Self is not just "out there," but also "in here" as baggage we bring along. Communities of love are more needed than a generation ago, and also more difficult because the Kingdom of Self has grown in power. This is why we need to see more clearly the powers that stand against us and be intentional about the material we use to build community.

However, in Jesus, we have the way to victory—and this is worth singing about. Christian intentional community is one way to bring ourselves into an environment where the powers of our age are tamed and made to work for the Kingdom of God. As Jesus' victory is lived through love and forgiveness in a shared life, His light can shine and His power will go forth.

Despite the glorification of the autonomous self in our society, I believe in every human heart there is a craving for unity. This desire may be deeply buried under personal experiences of hurt, and hidden by our culture of galloping individualism and alienation. But this longing is nevertheless a mark of God's image in us. God's character, as three unique persons in unity of love, is the source of our healing, community, and communion. Victory is ours in Jesus, now and in eternity. Halleluia! ©

Blessed by the Benedictines

Stephen Murphy

Grain of Wheat Church-Community

Grain of Wheat Church-Community (GoWC-C) has related to the community of sisters in Saint Benedict's Monastery and Retreat and Conference Centre since our beginnings. For over eighteen years we have been blessed by the charism of hospitality that the sisters embody as we have travelled north of Winnipeg to their lovely acreage along the Red River for personal and group retreats and workshops. The Christian community in and around Winnipeg benefits from the wide variety of spiritual topics they explore using local teachers, authors and musicians as well as those from far away who wouldn't come without their invitation.

In the beginning of GoWC-C Sr. Catherine came into the city and led us in Spiritual Formation workshops. She also joined Virgil Vogt as one of the visitation teams which gave us feedback in those early days. Sr. Roberta worked with John Krahn at Habitat for Humanity. Recently Irene Wiens and Stephen Murphy graduated from Shekinah School of Spiritual Direction after 3 years of study led by a couple of their members including that long-time friend, Sr. Catherine.

Many of us have joined the Benedictine community for prayers, during retreats and workshop weekends or on the Fridays when they offered Taize prayers. In Manitoba, they are leaders in encouraging contemplative prayer, offering Centring Prayer workshops and intensive retreats and training leaders for many contemplative prayer support groups. Some of us have taken the workshops and practice this form of prayer. Irene Wiens has taken the training and has co-led workshops outside St. Ben's. Annie Janzen participates in the monthly days of prayer they offer to all who live nearby.

Most recently the workshops they sponsored on Liturgy and Worship have given our musicians inspiration and encouragement. St. Ben's contributes in many ways to GoWC-C's desire to be ecumenical and when we get quiet enough we sense the Spirit's gentle and powerful work in us through our connection with them. ©

Contents

Blessed by the Benedictines.....	11
Church News.....	4
Community House Wrecking.....	2
Some Competencies of	
Community Membership.....	12
Editorial.....	1
Getting Acquainted.....	6
Poetry.....	10
Quotes.....	10
What I Did This Summer.....	3
A Year of Listening.....	9

Editor's Note

As you may have noticed, there was no Winter 2000 issue of *Shalom Connections*. We apologize for not being able to get all four issues to you last year, but we hope to do so in 2001.

Poetry

Heather Clark
Reba Place Fellowship

Planting on Mother's Day

For Dan

a far cry from our mothers' ample gardens,
this yard-wide strip bordered by garage, alley,
and chainlink fence, where we have set
small clumps of herbs into composted soil,
fragrant adornments for machine-picked produce

as we are far from the kids who plucked
fat caterpillars off scratchy plants and
shelled smooth firm peas into deep pans,
who tore barefoot through tomato-scented kitchens
where sturdy jars holding summer's plenty cooled

yet here there is blessing in tending
with earthy fingers rosemary, basil,
majoram, oregano, thyme, and chives,
sharing our doubled inheritance,
planted, expanding, seeded with new life.

May 1997

Adventure at Mount Trashmore

For Ric

It took us by surprise
this springlike day just after
the year's turning with
winter sure to return tomorrow

You made the most of it, splurging
on a kite to withstand windycity winds
hauling slickered kids westward
to give your new toy a hoist

coming back to barge into
the bathroom laughing, muddy
full of tales to tell
as we sat and soaked our legs.

(I should sleep but I can't
stop exulting in the fact
of small feet leaving leaden
boots stuck fast in rainsoaked clay.)

4 January 1997



Quotes

The classic Christian image of a seed growing speaks of the need for the stability of commitment. It takes only days to grow a blade of grass, but it takes decades to grow a strong, sturdy tree. A seed which is not watered or which is constantly being dug up will not grow into a tree. A seed which never gets the chance to put down deep roots will wither like the plants on rocky ground in the parable of the sower. Long-term commitment is essential to build anything worthwhile in the Christian life. The tree which allows the birds of the air to nest in it is not brought into being by people who dabble in Christian commitment. The implicit challenge of Christ is whether we will be part of the tree or merely one of the birds.

Rev. Phil Bradshaw, SCC is a member of the Community of Celebration. Taken from *News from Celebration*, Fall 2000.

The Old Testament's hope of the redeemed community is one where God's shalom reigns. The element of personal forgiveness is there, but so is the mutual belonging, the restoration of relationships, the social transformation, the victory over forces of decay and destruction, and God's healing touch.

In the New Testament the societal aspect of salvation is strongly stressed, as is its link with healing. To be sure, community and healing will never be complete in this life, any more than salvation will. Their climax lies beyond the grave. But any evangelism that does not make clear God's will to rescue and transform the whole of life, physical and spiritual, and does not make clear the mutual interdependence of those who are experiencing salvation, is deficient. Salvation is a mighty concept... It touches the whole of life: the notion of merely "saving souls" is profoundly unbiblical. [Salvation] embraces individuals in their lostness and fragmentation and puts them into the family of God the savior that, in turn, is intended to exert a profound effect upon society at large.

Michael Green, *Evangelism through the Local Church: A Comprehensive Guide to All Aspects of Evangelism* (Nashville, Thomas Nelson, 1992) pp. 33-34.



Shalom Connections

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What I Did This Summer

Opportunities for Summer Internships in SMC

Various Members
Shalom Mission Communities

Reba Place Fellowship

Summer internships begin June 16 and end August 18. A nine-month internship begins September 1. Interns work four days a week at earning tasks in the neighborhood or in Fellowship businesses. They participate one day a week in discipleship classes, volunteer in various Reba ministries, and live the common life of the community. There is no cost for this experience. The intern program provides for basic needs and offers a small allowance for incidental expenses.

The Reba Fellowship Intern Program is a great way to see how Christian intentional community works in an inter-racial and intergenerational setting, where Jesus' teachings are put into practice in a holistic way. Because of Reba's shared resources, we have been able to work together at the really meaningful task of building justice and peace into everyday ways of doing things. Since 1957 we have conducted many Kingdom-of-God experiments and found common ways to care for basic human needs like affordable housing, loving child-care, worship blending a rich variety of cultures and heritages, extended household living, racial reconciliation with our neighbors, providing wholesome food, sustaining ties with sister communities overseas, and companionship with persons of varying disabilities. Our life together is full of challenges, centered on love, and offers a radical way of seeing things that comes right out of the Gospels and the early church. Interested? You and your world will never be the same again.

Contact: Sara Belser or David Janzen
RPF Internship Program
PO Box 6575
Evanston, IL 60204
(847) 328-6066

reba_place@juno.com

Plow Creek Fellowship

Summer interns will work about half time on the Plow Creek farm and the rest on Fellowship activities like the Strawberry Festival, preparing for the SMC Camp Meeting, community gardening, food preservation, community meals, maintenance, playground building, child care, activity groups, volunteer work, mission projects... We encourage individual and group study, meditation, prayer. Areas of study and sharing will include Jean Vanier's book, *Community and Growth*, the Sermon on the Mount, simplicity and the more-with-less lifestyle, organic and sustainable farming, peacemaking and conflict resolution, and a look at biographies of saints.

Contact: Louise Stahnke
19183 Plow Creek Road
Tiskilwa, IL 61368
(815) 646-4264
mstahnke@juno.com

Church of the Sojourners

We invite you to move in with us for a few weeks and taste the life we share together in Jesus. The idea is for you to do an internship 6 hours a day, 4 days a week, in local service projects. One class a day provides teaching and discussion on the nature and purpose of the church. And you are invited to participate in every aspect of community life we can share with you, from meals together to worship to Bible study.

Some of the service possibilities include being a hospital volunteer, tutoring neighborhood children, working with Habitat for Humanity, or a study and service internship. The Sojourn will take place June 23 through July 30, 2001. We ask participants to raise \$400 from their local church for room, board and expenses. We also ask that you come with a list of at least eight people who are praying for you during the Sojourn. We are committed to not excluding anyone from the Sojourn because of cost. Please contact us if the cost will be a problem for you.

Contact: Tim Otto
1133 Florida Street
San Francisco, CA 94110
(800) 484-6977 x7237
timotto@churchofthesojourners.org

Visit www.churchofthesojourners.org to download the Summer Sojourn brochure.



Church News

News from Evanston

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Greg Clark began his service as RPF Reba Spiritual Leader in July 2000. His first steps were to meet with all the members over a period of several months, to learn each one's concerns and hopes for the Fellowship. Greg is part of a three-person leadership team called the LDG (for Lisa, David and Greg), of course. The three have been called a troika, but more recently, by the mystifying name of Children of Amram and Jochobed. Most of us did not know that these are the parents of an earlier leadership team of Miriam, Aaron and Moses.

In August Greg was inspired by a visit with John Miller (Waterloo, Ontario). As the founding leader of Reba Place, John could pass the mantle of blessing and good counsel to Greg. John and Louise still care much about the Fellowship. They have been invited to lead our spring Fellowship retreat.

Greg is not completely at peace with his title of spiritual leader. Calling one of our youngest members "The Elder" doesn't work. We may call him "The Toaster" since he believes feasts are Fellowship essentials and he likes to propose toasts. We are grateful to have Greg's gifts flowing in our common life, especially as he has given fresh articulation of our vision in a series of passionate teachings in members meetings.

We went through a process of creating about a dozen task teams to involve everyone and their gifts in the essential services of Fellowship life. These teams (we're trying hard to not call them committees) are charged with the tasks like care for Emmanuel Lodge, revising the constitution, preparing worship for common events, social events planning, new member contacts, separations, elder care, financial planning, Shalom Mission Community connections, internship program oversight, and Stewards. It feels like the Fellowship engine is running on all cylinders.

Sally Schreiner has led us through a couple of discussions of Reba Place Fellowship's relationship with Reba Place Church. Both institutions have changed greatly in recent years and old assumptions have to

be adjusted. We want to clarify Reba Place Fellowship's mission and then enter into a dialogue with Church leadership to clarify how we can bless each other in our distinct roles.

Some events on our calendar have been:

- In July Reba Place Church of Rogers Park took on a new name—Living Water Community Church. This signals another step of maturity for this congregation in which Sally Schreiner is the Pastor and Lisa Blackwood is the church secretary.

- On Labor Day we had a day of labor to fix up the Emmanuel Lodge at Camp Lake in Wisconsin. A great time raking leaves, washing windows, burning trash and roasting burgers.

- In October we said farewell to Joyce and Larry Clark who moved with to the Phoenix area where they are closer to family and to a medical team that can support her battle for life with a brain tumor and related health issues.

- November 16 was an open house at the 25-unit Seward Apartments, to celebrate the completion of the first set of apartments affordable for low-income tenants. This project has been supported by churches, and city and federal agencies in an attempt to turn around a troubled building in our neighborhood.

- November 19 we had an open house and time of worship with our neighbors at the 625 Madison Building to celebrate two years of renovations that have created a beautiful professional building with seven suites of community-minded tenants just across from the Meeting House.

- Through December we have had over 30 inches of snow—a most beautiful winter with plenty of cardiovascular exercise in shoveling and scraping the white stuff. On the fourth Sunday of Advent Virginia Brown fell on the ice, going to church, and has been homebound ever since with a very slow recovery. Linas has been staying home with her instead of doing many of his usual services in the community. Intern Jodi Thompson has moved in with the Browns to offer house care and companionship. Browns and Jodi have fallen in love with each other and the care they can give and receive is a God-send.

- Sara Belser has put in a lot of good writing work to create an intern program handbook with David Janzen and the task team. Jodi Thompson is our first intern.

- Doug Selph has come to Reba (Rogers Park) for three months to build a relation-

ship with the Blackwood family as he and Lisa continue their courtship.

- In early June we are planning a community visitation/review led by Richard and Judy Hays and two persons from Church of the Sojourners.

The big saga around here began to unfold when we learned on December 19 that Carl Evans (14) had been picked from high school up by a Goshen, IN police detective. Chris (mom) and Carl (son) were living in Goshen since late summer so Carl could attend Bethany Christian High School. Chris turned herself in to the police to face charges. Doug and Cindy Baker (formerly of Reba and Plow Creek) were of tremendous help and support to Chris in those first days of crisis. Reba Fellowship gathered in an emergency prayer meeting that first night. We have been blessed by a strong spirit of solidarity in prayer and love for Chris and Carl as each bit of news further unfolds the story.

Chris came to Reba nine years ago fleeing an abusive relationship with Carlton's father when child protective services did not believe Chris and Carlton's report. Chris is now under bail and charged with interfering with visitation rights and interstate flight. Chris has moved to Bethlehem PA, where Hilda Carper preceded her to set up an apartment and arrange support for an anticipated custody battle in the Allentown court. They are in the same apartment building as Wes and Elsie Mast, on leave from Plow Creek. What a support team!

We have been praying fervently since then for Chris and Carl (their original names are Cynthia and Kit Norton, but they still prefer Chris and Carl) and have seen answers to many prayers. Allan Howe was able to procure one of the top lawyers in the country in this field of child custody for Chris' defense as well as a fine local attorney in Allentown. Greg Clark has been receiving communications and passing them on. If you would like to know more about this situation or be on the email list, contact him at gclark@northpark.edu. Reba Place Fellowship soliciting financial donations toward Chris' legal defense, which will likely exceed \$100,000.

The situation has taken many confusing turns. Carl was supposed to be in the custody of Lehigh County Child Protective Services, but was taken by Carl's father's attorney to Maryland and put into an institution for de-programming—confirming the fears Chris had in fleeing the first time. By now Carl is in his father's custody and living

A Year of Listening

Overseers' Report to the Congregation

Jack Bernard
Church of the Sojourners

Life stage of community as opportunity

Communities usually go through a time of transition as they reach fifteen years of age and by that standard we are right on schedule. At this stage, communities are usually faced with the desire for reform from many members, but those who want reform don't agree with each other on the reforms they want. The zeal of the original vision has faded and some feel the need for a renewed focus on the founding principles and some want to set out in a different direction. In this too, we are experiencing the normal life cycle of community. Many communities do not survive this process and those that do usually change in some important ways. We overseers are seeing this as a window of opportunity rather than a crisis. We are not just trying to put a positive spin on a difficult situation. We are simply choosing to interpret our present situation through the lens of faith in God's promise of his presence with us.



Whether God created the situation we are now in, or whether we created it by our own sinfulness, the assumption that we need to interpret it according to faith still stands. We cannot go back to where we were and we should not try to. Debates about where we were, and whether or not where we were was a good place, are not very useful. Wanting to go back to the old place has always been a temptation for God's people when he is trying to lead them to a new place. Conversely, we must not run to a place of our own choosing. This is not a time to think in terms of where we want the church to go but to see where God is leading us.

We are not saying that we were in the wrong place and now need to get to the right place. Rather, we are saying that this is a time in which God is inviting us to move

to a new level of relationship with himself. Even though this is an unsettled time in our life as a community, it is precisely in such unsettled times that God's people find him to be the most accessible.

What we need, in order to pass successfully through this time of transition, is a renewed sense of our purpose and calling as a community. We need a calling that gives us a clear sense of how we fit into the rest of Christ's body and a common sense of mission that gives unity and purpose to our individual lives. This is what we need to go forward, but we cannot just invent it for ourselves. It must be given to us.

What we need to do

We Overseers have no clear sense of leading in terms how we should reorganize the many aspects of our lives or that we should reformulate our basic vision of the church. We do, however, have clear sense that we need to be turning toward God himself in a deeper and more intensive way than we have been. If you are worried that everything in our lives is now up in the air, we are not looking at it that way. We believe that our original vision of "being the church" is right and we have no sense that God is turning us from that purpose. Quite the contrary, we think he is turning our call, to be the church, toward a deepening relationship with himself toward cultivating the fruits of the Spirit.

The process of a deepening relationship with God and the resulting fruit is under his control, not ours. What we can do is to try and place ourselves in a receptive frame of mind, and that is the role of spiritual disciplines and other forms we may discover or revise to direct our attention toward God himself. With that intention, we believe we should devote the next year what we would like to call a "Year of Listening."

We all bring with us long-standing notions of what God is like and how he relates to us. We need a real openness to having God stretch our experience of himself and our conceptions of who he is, how we know him, and what he is making us into. In short, we need to listen to what he is teaching us about himself.

May your roots go down deep into the soil of God's marvelous love. And may you have the power to understand, as all God's people should, how wide, how long, how high, and how deep his love really is. May you experience the love of Christ, though it is so great you will never fully understand it. Then you will be filled with the fullness of life and power that comes from God.

(Ephesians 3:17b-19 NLT)

We also need a new openness to God stretching our conceptions of each other. After all the years we have been together we have firmly established ideas of who each other is. We will have to discard the categories with which we have come to identify each other and learn to see each other afresh through the lens of the tender affection of our God. Again, we need to listen to what he is teaching us about each other.

Yes, each of us will have to give a personal account to God. So don't condemn each other anymore. Decide instead to live in such a way that you will not put an obstacle in another Christian's path. For the Kingdom of God is not a matter of what we eat or drink, but of living a life of goodness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. If you serve Christ with this attitude, you will please God. And other people will approve of you, too. So then, let us aim for harmony in the church and try to build each other up. (Romans 14:12-13, 17-19 NLT)

We overseers are aware that the above is particularly an exhortation to ourselves. We have, at times, fallen into labeling people in a way that has placed obstacles in front of people rather than called them on in love. We want to cooperate with God's gracious efforts to change us. We hope to lead the Church by example in this, and not just by exhortation.

Dealing with specifics

These are the types of things we have in mind implementing though we are not at this time offering a specific proposal:

- Practicing spiritual disciplines according to a common format
- Establishing a context for each of us to discuss and receive direction in our pursuit of spiritual growth
- Preaching/teaching devoted to themes such as fruits of the Spirit and spiritual disciplines
- Promoting household discussions around this theme

The Overseers propose that we set aside a Saturday in January to discuss how we might devote the coming year to learning to listen to the heart of God. (This will include teaching and congregational discussion). From there we would proceed to decide on a weekly schedule that would facilitate this purpose. ©

This article was excerpted from a letter from the CoS Overseers to the congregation in December 2000 as preparation for their Year of Listening.

News from Waco

Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Fellowship

We are looking forward to hosting the SMC meeting here in Waco!

Marla Pierson (HF member) married Matt Lester in December. Matt has explored commitment to HF, but has also been heavily involved with Church Under the Bridge. We will be having further discussions with them about where they will really plant themselves.

Marla's marriage opened up some space upstairs in our meeting house. Hope Fellowship has decided to start using some of the upstairs space. Another single woman who had been living upstairs will continue there.

We have decided recently that we need to slow the membership process down (although it generally takes more than a year anyway—so what we are really saying is we will intensify the membership process). We have two individuals interested in membership whose spouses are only marginally involved, which provides a welcome challenge. It seems to us that not only did the early church have to deal with this dynamic, but also that it is one that is timely today. Another family, the Gisslers, who have been looking at membership for about nine months, are also now considering moving into the neighborhood. We have called together a discernment group to work with them on several important issues.

J.B. Smith, a HF member, returned recently from three weeks in Guatemala, where he was studying Spanish. Some consideration was given to naming 2001 as a Year of Spanish for Hope Fellowship, but we settled on a Year of Peace as our theme. In that Jesus is our peace, breaking down the dividing wall of hostility, we feel that part of God's work with us this year will be to more deliberately attempt to have Spanish be a full-partner, first language of the church.

Norma Torres has been nominated as pastor, to join Joe and Nancy Gatlin on the pastoral leadership team. The membership is supportive of Norma's candidacy, but has also begun to identify several issues for discussion.

Barbara Bridgewater had a sudden onset of depression and panic attacks in December. She and the two Bridgewater daughters are now spending a month in New York with one of her sisters. Barbara will probably

not be back for the SMC meeting. We are encouraged by good daily reports from her.

Dale Barron quit his job of ten years with the Methodist home and is working as a full-time volunteer for the World Hunger Relief farm. HF has celebrated the step of faith that Dale took in this transition. We are also pleased both with the additional support for World Hunger and the extra time Dale has available for HF.

We have enjoyed SMC Thanksgiving visitors: the Zazvorkas and Lily Martinez from Sojourners and Megan Reha from Plow Creek. Dan Zazvorka stayed with us for several weeks. And we are looking forward to having John and Judy Alexander with us this weekend.

Upcoming events and issues: Our first men's retreat this weekend (the major reason for John's and Judy's visit). Another baby due this year (the Barrons). An all-church retreat at Easter Deliberation on finances and stewardship.



News from Winnipeg

Melanie Dennis
Grain of Wheat Church-Community

This summer, Sarah Galbraith married Jason Miles shortly before they left on a short-term missions trip to Kazakhstan. In December, Grain of Wheat celebrated the marriage of Jana Estabrooks and Scott Gerbrandt. Two more engagements in the Estabrooks family promise more celebrations to come. We were also able to celebrate with Craig Terlon and Kerry Callan as they were married this winter.

We were all blessed to join with the Maendel-Braun household and mom Rachael in celebrating the birth of baby Ethan and with Jenn Nast-Kolb and Marcus Rempel in the birth of Johanna Shalom.

This January, Kerry Callan's father Jack passed away. A memorial service was held at Kerry and Craig's house. Henry Pauls, Beth Sawatsky, and Roger Gateson have also deeply felt the loss of parents in recent

months. We continue to hold those who have lost loved ones and to pray for God's comfort and peace.

The new Grain of Wheat Seed groups were formed and began to meet this fall. The groups formed around different interests or topics such as Clowning, The Economics of Love, Christian Whole Person Health Care, Youth Ministry, Personal Growth, and A Pilgrim's Way Bible study. Some of the first fruits of the seed groups have been the opening of the Wellspring Health Care Centre and a presentation given by the Economics of Love group on RRSPs.

This fall, Marnie Chivers became a member of Grain of Wheat. Tammy Kasak, Christine Cumming, and Melanie Dennis entered a year of novice membership. And one chilly Sunday morning at Bird's Hill Park (just north of Winnipeg), Tessa Callan was baptized in a joyful (and teeth-chattering) celebration.

We continue to think of and pray for Jarem and Rhona Sawatsky in Harrisonburg, VA at the Eastern Mennonite University, Paul and Angela Neufeld in Vancouver for studies and MCC work, and Chris and Mona Lacey in Calgary as they are away from us for a time.

Some faraway folks have come to stay with us for a while: John, Hilde, Katinka, Tiril, and Frieda Krahn have come from Norway to be with us for six months.

Several people from Grain of Wheat are involved in prison ministry at the Remand Center in Winnipeg, leading worship times with inmates there on Sunday evenings. This is a new and exciting way for us to carry worship outside of our community.

We thanked and blessed Jane Gateson and Larry Campbell as they left the leadership team. Beth Sawatsky and Marvin Hamm continue as Servant Leaders, and Irene Wiens will soon join them in their ministry.

A Hospitality Committee was created at Grain of Wheat this fall. We have been blessed with many new faces and the presence of several students from the Canadian Mennonite University and other universities at our worship time on Sundays, and are looking forward to creatively and consciously welcoming them to our community.

As we look back on the changes in recent months and toward the many more to come, we have much to be thankful for, much to celebrate, to look forward to, and to remember. Thank you for sharing in these things with us. ©

in New York City. There will be more court hearings about Carl's custody and Chris' criminal charges. At Reba we are eager for the criminal case to unfold so that it can become public why Chris fled with Carl nine years ago. This whole situation has profoundly affected Reba. Although we regret the dangerous situation this places Chris and Carl in, we are also grateful the secrecy is ended. We continue to pray for their protection and to trust God with Chris and Carl's lives and welfare. Your prayers will help a lot.



News from Tiskilwa

Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

Margaret and David Gale are celebrating a 40th wedding anniversary this April. They look forward to a fall Amtrak anniversary trip to California to visit family—their son Andy and son Steve (with family Jill and Hannah). They hope to also stop to see the Grand Canyon on the way.

Matt Reha and Heidi Foss were both part of a one week spring-break mission trip from Goshen College to Jubilee Partners in Comer, GA.

Jon Foss has been named for the All Conference First String Basketball Team, which is a recognition of the top players in the high school conference.

Rich Foss and Louise Stahnke attended a leaders retreat at Camp Menno Haven where Stanley Green (head of Mennonite Board of Missions) spoke on being Missional Churches.

The teen fund-raising mystery dinner happens March 17 from 6-8 p.m. The teen group wants to attend the Cornerstone Christian Music Festival put on by Jesus People the beginning week of July.

Utami (Tutuk Horning's sister) and her two children, Christoff and Bunga, visited at Plow Creek from Dec. 9 to Feb. 24. We have been praying unceasingly for them. Utami is facing the reality of a divorce, and her former husband is planning a Muslim marriage festival the beginning of March. Lyn Fitz accompanied Utami and her children on their return trip to Indonesia. Continued prayer is important as Utami finds supportive friends and family and relocates in Indonesia.

We've also been praying for Chris and Carlton Evans as the legal battles continue in court. Join us in these prayers.

Rich Foss is considering a sabbatical in late 2001 or 2002. He is looking for time to rest, study leadership, write a book on leadership, and develop curriculum for a Growing Leaders course. He is assuming he would raise money in grants/gifts/book advance for the sabbatical to be feasible.

Steve Graham is beginning work with Windpower Electric and is looking to expand into various areas of alternative energy. Boo Graham is working Fridays and Saturdays for a local dentist, Dr. Timothy Haas.

Lord willing, Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen are planning to accompany the mid-March trip to El Salvador. They hope to participate in the 20th Anniversary Memorial Walk to the Rio Lempa, remembering the army sweep of the northern Cabañas Department in 1981. They are sobered by the division and sharp criticism in the community as the land titling process is moving forward through the efforts of CoCoDA. Keep this process in prayer.

We are all looking forward to the hope of springtime! Pray for important decisions on the operation of the farm.



News from San Francisco

Laura Todd Hare
Church of the Sojourners

As many of you already know, John Alexander was recently diagnosed with acute leukemia and entered the hospital February 28 for five weeks of chemotherapy. He will be in the hospital for his treatment because it will eradicate his immune system so he needs to be in a nice sterile environment. This news was very sudden and came on the same day—literally within five minutes—of Judy learning that her mother has colon cancer (and subsequently learned that she has much more cancer throughout her body). Obviously, this is a pretty shocking jolt for the Alexanders and for our congregation as a whole. We had just begun to discuss John's role in leadership since John and Judy's return from their service to Church of the

Servant King in Gardena. The good news is that both John and Judy are exuding God's peace (and Jenny too). John has been in excellent spirits ever since Wednesday, and it seems to us that he has deeply surrendered himself to God's care. Please keep John, Judy, and Jenny, as well as Judy's parents, in your prayers as these important weeks unfold.

Luke and Sara Mast are expecting their first child in April. That is very exciting news for all of us. Naomi can't wait to have another little child around. [Ed. A healthy Carissa Joy Mast was born on March 31, weighing 7 lb 14 oz, at 21" long!]

Three of Louise Harris' grandchildren came from Belize to celebrate Christmas with us. Her oldest grandson, Austin, is living with us indefinitely. He is 13 years old and will be attending a private Christian school where both Dan and Kelly Zazvorka teach. Austin is a great kid and has been a great addition to our household.

Doug Selph left in February to go to Rogers Park for three months as he and Lisa Blackwood explore their relationship. We are very happy and excited for Doug. Lisa is a quality woman.

Hannah Zazvorka and Zoe Mullery and also Zoe's dad Mike Mullery will accompany the group which travels to Valle Nuevo, El Salvador every year in March. We are hoping that God will open special opportunities for them to serve this year with the earthquakes and tense land questions looming.

We had a great Advent season. It was very life-giving. The plays that were done each week in our worship services stand out in my mind as especially meaningful. Our Christmas Eve service was beautiful. We have the habit of celebrating Christmas together as a church every other year and this year we had the pleasure of being together.

We have also entered into what we are calling the Year of Listening. In the last several months we have realized that we have put more emphasis on relationship with each other than with God. We want to spend the next year learning to listen to God and, in turn, to each other. We are talking a lot about spiritual disciplines and practices. One practice we are asking each member to do is to stop and read a psalm/prayer three times a day (morning, afternoon, and evening). These are to serve as markers in our day to remind us that we are about following Jesus. We are also asking people to spend at least 30 minutes a day in reading and meditating on scripture.

Getting Acquainted

The Zazvorka Family

Hannah Zazvorka
Church of the Sojourners

“He’s able... He’s able... We know he’s able. We know our Lord is able to carry us through.” Those powerful words flow from a popular song amongst the Zazvorka family. They have traveled through years of experiences that have taught them “he is able.” God has walked with Dan, Kelly, Jaime, and Hannah through the thick and the thin. He has shown them that He will provide if they just trust in Him and follow His voice.

The voice of the Lord has led their family to the south, the north, the west, the east and in between. It is through His grace and love that the Zazvorka family has become what it is today.

The Zazvorkas are a well-knit family. They have been through a lot together. From the sunny city of San Diego to the capital of the Yucatan Peninsula; from Highland, Wisconsin, a town of 800, to Mexico City, a city of millions, God has set their family on a windy road, but one with much direction.

Dan is the father and husband in the

Zazvorka clan. He is a man who can sit and discuss theology, or find just as much joy playing games with a small child. He attended seminary in Dubuque, Iowa, pastored a church in Highland, Wisconsin, and taught classes in a seminary in Yucatan, Mexico. He enjoys creating pieces of art and capturing God’s beauty in photographs. Dan has been an example to his family of what it means to trust God.

Kelly is the mother and wife of the family. She cooks a delicious pot of chicken noodle soup and finds joy in serving others. She has done an excellent job of caring for



her family and making sure everything is in order around the house. Until recently she was employed as a full time mom and loved it. She is now teaching a cooking and sewing class at a local middle school. Kelly has laid down her wants and desires to better serve her family. She has been an example of finding strength in God when things get tough.

Jaime is the older of the two daughters. She is 19 years old and recently moved

to Auburn, three hours from her family’s home in San Francisco, where she’s attending junior college. She is engaged to be married to Marvin Trapnell. She finds great joy in being out in God’s creation and is a listening ear for those in need. Jaime is an example of one who loves deeply.

He has shown them that He will provide if they just trust in Him and follow His voice.

Hannah is the younger daughter. She is 17 years old and a senior in high school. She loves children and can’t wait to someday have a role just like her mother’s. She has continued on her family’s tradition of traveling and has made connections with friends from all over. She enjoys writing letters and is committed to her weekly babysitting jobs. Hannah is an example of what it means to be a servant of God.

The Zazvorkas now live in San Francisco, California, where they are part of the Church of the Sojourners. They are active in the church and are thankful for the family God has given them there. God continues to work in each of them teaching them more and more each day: “He is able to carry them through.”



The Gales

Margaret Gale
Plow Creek Fellowship

David and I met at Reba Place Fellowship in the fall of 1959 and were married there on April 2 1961. I came from ethnic Mennonite roots in the Shenandoah Valley of Virginia. I initially came to Reba Place to be with my sister, Joanna Lehman when she and John had her their first child. I had been seeking a way to serve God with my whole life and felt He had led me there. David came from a Presbyterian family in Minnesota. His father was a minister and social worker. His mother taught art in Christian summer camps. After graduation from Macalester College, he spent several years working for the American Friends Service Committee, and was involved in the radical



David (top row, 3rd from right) and Margaret (bottom row, 2nd from right) Gale and family

peace movement. At one point, he was a member of the crew of “The Golden Rule,” a sailboat whose plan was to sail into the bomb test area. We both joined Reba Place Fellowship and made what we felt was a lifetime commitment to follow God in Community as the best way we could see to get at the roots of violence, injustice and greed, and to help bring God’s kingdom to earth.

Our joining Reba Place led to us spending five years at Church of Hope in inner city Chicago along with Julius and Peggy Belser, Hilda Carper, Albert Steiner and Jeanne and Allan Howe. We were involved with the Civil Rights movement of the time. While there, we were blest with the birth of three sons (including twins) and a daughter. We moved back to Reba Place along with others when Church of Hope fell victim to Urban renewal. Our fifth child, a son, was born during our following five years in Evanston.

Our next move was to be sent by Reba Place Fellowship to help establish Plow Creek Fellowship along with Conrad and Martyne Wetzal, Fred and Ruth Warner and their families. We went with a lot of enthusiasm and energy for what we felt God was calling us to do. Plow Creek consisted at that time of a run down farmhouse and buildings in the valley, junk cars, and fields. There were no buildings at the top of the hill. We envisioned a community thriving there and God blessed our vision (and lots of hard work) with the Plow Creek that now exists.

David was involved in planning and building all of our buildings. He worked for

contractors in Princeton for several years and has worked for many years as a Plow Creek Builder along with Rich Reha and others. He has been involved in the business side of operating Plow Creek throughout all of Plow Creek’s history of twenty-nine years. For eight years, he has been doing the book-keeping for Plow Creek.

I began working as an R.N. for Ed Johnson when he established a medical clinic in Tiskilwa as a ministry and business of Plow Creek Fellowship. I worked there for the ten years Ed was there and continued to work for the doctor who took his place for two more years. I then took a part-time job in a retirement home in Princeton. In October of



1997, I retired from nursing, as well as from eleven years or so of being an elder at Plow Creek. I am currently one of the care givers for Donna Harnish, one of our members that needs full-time care.

Our children grew up here and were a vital part of our life and work throughout those years. Four of our children graduated from Bethel College in Newton, KS. The fifth child graduated from Goshen College in Goshen, IN. Our oldest son is a medical doctor and lives in Dixon, IL along with his wife and four sons. Our daughter lives in Milwaukee, WI with her husband and two daughters. She plans to teach first grade this year while her husband attends graduate school at Marquette University. One of our sons is a psychologist at a medical clinic in Big Bear City, CA. His wife is also a psychologist and they have a little daughter. His twin brother works as a research scientist at Scripps Laboratories in La Jolla, CA. We feel especially blessed to have our youngest son, Tim, and his wife Carol and two daughters living at Plow Creek and members of Plow Creek Church. Carol is currently working as a physician’s assistant at a nearby medical clinic while Tim takes care of their two little girls.

Our children and their families continue as a high priority for us and our life here allows that to happen.

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We have experienced God’s faithfulness through some very hard and some very good times here at Plow Creek. Recently I became aware that I had become weary of the hard work of living in community and that I had been coasting on my commitment of long ago. As I sought the Lord, I felt anew the call to community and have been given a sense of renewed energy for our life together. I believe God is still calling us to serve Him in this way. ©



The Zazvorkas (l to r): Hannah, Kelly, Dan and Jaime