

# Poetry

Rich Foss  
Plow Creek Fellowship

## Leadership #23

A leader celebrates the tadpole becoming a frog even when it is his skin that is breaking out in strange appendages.

A tadpole has no need of voice as he slips away from snake and fish

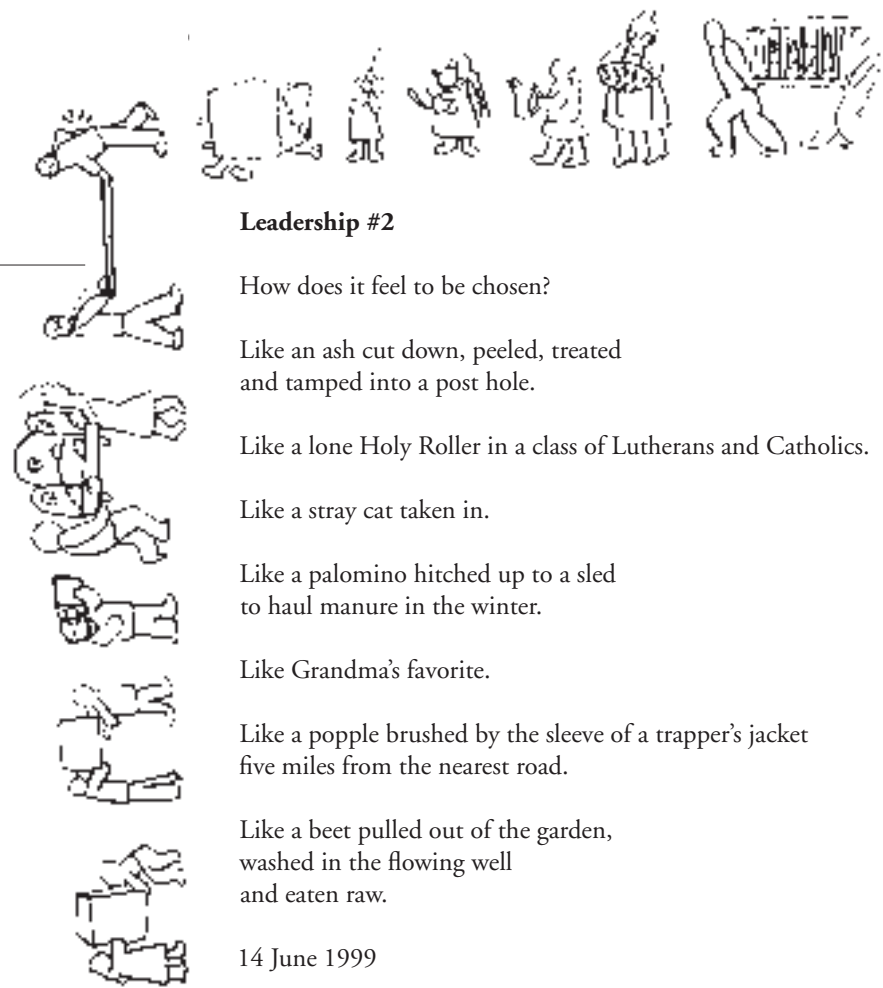
nor did Jesus as he slid into the mouth of the Sanhedrin.

A tadpole, content and silent in the least pond, suddenly makes a surge for the border and in three days legs appear.

I have a crazy urge to say something.

Once I was a tadpole, now I am a full-throated croak.

15 June 2000



## Leadership #2

How does it feel to be chosen?

Like an ash cut down, peeled, treated and tamped into a post hole.

Like a lone Holy Roller in a class of Lutherans and Catholics.

Like a stray cat taken in.

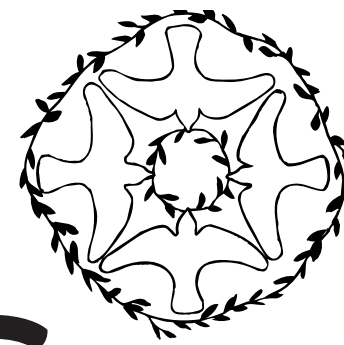
Like a palomino hitched up to a sled to haul manure in the winter.

Like Grandma's favorite.

Like a popple brushed by the sleeve of a trapper's jacket five miles from the nearest road.

Like a beet pulled out of the garden, washed in the flowing well and eaten raw.

14 June 1999



# Shalom Connections

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF SHALOM MISSION COMMUNITIES

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## Valle Nuevo

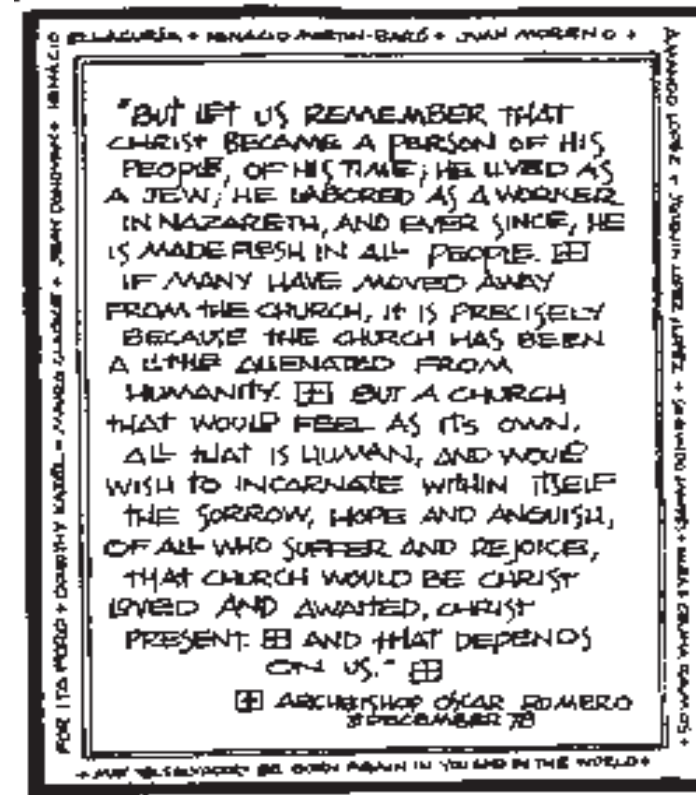
March 16-25, 2001

Richard Friesen  
Plow Creek Fellowship

We were ten persons from five affiliated Shalom Mission Communities in Illinois, Texas and California, converging on El Salvador for a visit to the rural community of Valle Nuevo. This was the ninth annual delegation begun by Reba Place Fellowship in Evanston and Plow Creek Fellowship in Tiskilwa, Illinois. Over the years this relationship called South-North Partners, has drawn participation from a widening circle of communities.

**Our Guide** Yvonne Dilling, who first introduced us to Valle Nuevo, led our delegation this year. She has a deep connection to the people of Valle Nuevo that began when she swam children across the Rio Lempa over and over again on the 18th of March, 1981 while dodging machine gun fire.

Yvonne shares in her book, *In Search of Refuge*, "I was certain I would die. Yet it was not a deeply spiritual experience. I remember that I did not pray in the traditional sense; but now I understand what it means to make my whole life a prayer. I have prayed with my hands and feet every day since then. I prayed with my whole being as I held the children under that tree and as I swam people across the water. When I saw the boy fall wounded into the river, I knew I had no right to pray that God save me. My life is no more precious to God than the lives of all those children and anguished parents. Yet I did not die. I gave up my life in those moments, and it was given back. There



is release and freedom in that knowledge. I want to make every minute count now."

Our first visit to Valle Nuevo, in early February 1992, occurred during celebrations of the historic Salvadoran peace accords ending more than a decade of civil war. We witnessed a United Nations Peacekeepers helicopter arrive with rebel leadership to explain the demobilization plans to Northern Cabañas guerrilla troops concentrated on the soccer field in Valle Nuevo.

**The Land** Later in 1992 our sister community communicated to us an urgent need. As recently repatriated refugees, they had no land and were renting from a

landlord who wanted to sell. Unless the community could be assured of the use of the land, they would need to take down their homes and look for another place to live. Reba Place and Plow Creek were in touch with churches and donors who helped raise \$34,000 for the first half payment on the land. Co-Community Development Alternatives (CoCoDA), a development agency based in Indianapolis and El Salvador, took out a loan for the remainder needed.

South-North Partners, CoCoDA and the leadership of Valle Nuevo have struggled over the intervening years to resolve the problem of how to title the land of the community. To begin with, the land never had been properly surveyed and entered in the govern-

› Valle Nuevo cont on p.14

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# Growing Leaders Who Listen

Rich Foss  
Plow Creek Fellowship

In 1992 the founder of Plow Creek began to disclose a history of sexual misconduct. I was the lead elder at the time and he was a member of Plow Creek as well as our conference minister.

Plow Creek almost drowned in grief and mistrust. From 1992 to 1997 over half the families left. Plow Creek was a miserable place and I don't blame people for leaving. Those of us who stayed hung on for dear life.

As I look back now I see that God had more plans that just to help Plow Creek survive. He was preparing me to teach leaders to lead in ways that do not wound people but help them to thrive.

By the summer of 1993 I needed a break. Plow Creek and Horizon House, where I served three days a week as director of development, gave me the summer off. I rested and finished a novel I had been working on for five years.

The second publisher I submitted it to published *Jonas and Sally* in hard cover. I thought, "Great, I love this writing business. Maybe I could teach writing at a college near Plow Creek and continue writing." I announced to Plow Creek and Horizon House that I was going use the next year to develop a plan to pursue this dream.

A few months later the director of Hori-

zon House told me that HH had to do a \$1.2 million fund drive and he couldn't manage it without me. HH wanted to replace a nursing home for developmentally disabled adults with 15 small group homes, a change I had first advocated in the early 1980's. After listening to the Lord, I set aside my writing plans and for the next two-and-a-half years directed the campaign.

Leading Plow Creek through the betrayal by our founder was one type of leadership. Leading a major fundraising campaign was another. As the campaign director I created an organization that ultimately included four staff and over 100 volunteers. The Lord was kind to provide me a mentor, a retired YMCA executive from the Chicago area who had directed many similar campaigns.

In the early days of the campaign I spent quite a few pre-dawn hours crying out to the Lord for wisdom to handle the staff opposition to the campaign. The Lord gave me three words that I printed out and taped above my desk: *Rich's job description: Listen, envision, encourage.* The comptroller, one of the early critics of the campaign, scrawled across the sheet, "What about work?" One evening when I was working late on the campaign, she angrily questioned my integrity related to the campaign, and I found myself responding to her through tears.

In my quiet times I moaned, "Lord, why are you having me do this campaign? My first love is elderying, my second love is writing, and while I enjoy fundraising, it's distant third. So why are you having me put so much time into fund raising?"

## Classifieds

**Looking for a partner for Growing Leaders**  
I am looking for a partner, someone who is as excited about teaching leaders as I am, someone to help me create Growing Leaders from the ground up. I am looking for in a partner who is:

1. Rooted and grounded in God's love.
2. An experienced leader.
3. Called to help organize Growing Leaders. I'd love for that person to be someone from SMC but I am open to whomever the Lord calls. With the Internet, travel and phone systems, I can envision a partner who lives any where in the USA or Canada so you wouldn't have to relocate. If you are interested in being a partner or have someone to recommend, you can contact me, Rich Foss, at (815) 646-6600 or e-mail me at richfoss@theramp.net.

One morning the Lord apparently had enough of my complaints and he said, "Richard, I am having you do this because I can teach you some things about leadership through the campaign that I can't teach you any other way." His word was like a batch of seeds in the spring for a farmer. The campaign was a new kind of leading for me and I learned a bushel of new ways to lead.

In the fall of 1997 we raised the final three gifts that put us over the \$1.2 million mark. By the end of the campaign, the comptroller who had led the staff opposition was one of the chief supporters. She even persuaded her HOGs (Harley Owners Group) to make a contribution.

That fall I proposed to Fellowship members that long term, I would like to raise funds for a Plow Creek-based minis-

› **Growing Leaders** cont on p.12



One of the Dead Sea Squirrels

neyed up a steep hill to El Zapote, a nearby community, for an afternoon of song. It was very rewarding to hear the spirit with which the children sang and praised God together. Another afternoon a couple of teens led a puppet-making session with some children. Several catechists also participated in portraying the story of Israel's crossing of the Jordan River and of the Good Samaritan. We were encouraged to see how the catechists and the children were eager to make more puppets and to use them to communicate Bible stories.

**Summer visitors** We hope to have two women from Valle Nuevo visit Plow Creek this summer: Reina Hernández Torres and Claudia Rodríguez Láinez. Reina has three children and is the daughter of Tomasa Torres who participated in the first exchange in 1992. Claudia is 17 years old and is doing



Reina Hernández,  
Valle Nuevo, El Salvador

the noon news broadcast on Radio Victoria, a community station serving the surrounding area, reaching into Honduras. We pray their visas will be granted and that their visit can be beneficial to all with whom they come into contact! Perhaps visits to other SMC communities can be arranged during their stay from June to August.

**Dramatic Changes in El Salvador**  
Our group heard from a Jesuit priest, Dean Brackley, who teaches theology at the pastoral center of the Catholic University. He gave us an overview of the religious, socio-political, and economic life in El Salvador. The country is changing dramatically. After the first earthquake in January, the govern-

ment instituted dollarization, which means that U.S. dollars can now be used as currency throughout the country. It is challenging, at best, and very humiliating for the common people to have to think and calculate in dollars rather than their familiar colones. Prices at gas pumps and grocery stores are in dollars now.

Father Brackley commented that about one-third of Salvadorans are malnourished and do not have basic needs met (food, clothing, shelter). El Salvador spends the lowest in the world on education, with the median years of schooling being 4.9 years. El Salvador is a very violent place, experiencing the disintegration of families and the failure to incorporate ex-combatants into the society. The country is rife with guns and has no control on arms. Crime affects the country dramatically, ranging from official government crime to organized crime and gang violence. Nevertheless, El Salvador is, he says, the most hopeful country in Central America in politics because the war proved that the political opposition couldn't be eliminated and that a political settlement had to be reached. But the Catholic Church is in crisis with the extremely traditional and authoritarian church crumbling or at least showing signs of increasing polarization.

**Division over Romero** Opinion is divided in El Salvador about the legacy of the martyred Archbishop. This is seen graphically at the national cathedral, which

Romero refused to repair until the poor were taken care of first. Now the archbishop says mass upstairs for the rich in the renovated sanctuary, while the poor worship downstairs in a storage room next to the crypt of the fallen archbishop. We participated in various vigils/masses on March 24, the anniversary of his assassination. It was meaningful to have a couple of women from Valle Nuevo with us as we attended Romero commemorations in the capital and in Cojutapeque—a town flattened by the earthquake. One of our hosts, Teresa, was present at Romero's funeral in 1980 when army snipers shot into the square in front of the cathedral, killing and wounding many. She told us how she escaped to a side street for safety.

One outstanding quote from Romero hangs at the back of the Divina Providencia hospital chapel, where he was assassinated: "My attitude should be to give my life for God no matter how my life ends. The unknown circumstances will be lived with God's grace. He was present to the martyrs, and if it's necessary I will feel very near to him as I surrender to him my last breath. But more courageous than the moment of dying is to surrender to him all one's life and live for him!" The influence of this Roman Catholic Archbishop is profound—calling us Anabaptists to a more radical discipleship! ©



I HOPE YOU DON'T MIND MAKING YOUR OWN BED...

## Contents

|  |    |
|--|----|
| Church News.....                                 | 6  |
| Classifieds .....                                | 2  |
| A Jug, A Dog and Thou .....                      | 10 |
| For Those to Whom You Have<br>Given So Much..... | 4  |
| Growing Leaders Who Listen.....                  | 2  |
| John Alexander .....                             | 3  |
| Poetry .....                                     | 16 |
| Valle Nuevo.....                                 | 1  |
| Zoe's El Salvador .....                          | 11 |



ment land registry by any former owners. Elected community leaders have not been able to win enough trust to complete the project. Lawyers taking on the task have left it unfinished for a variety of reasons. And a national government inclined toward private ownership had few laws and supports for cooperatives and communal ownership.

The elected Valle Nuevo land commission, which has been working on the land issue for the past two years, has been decimated by threats and by members whose personal plans took them out of the community. The land was provisionally titled in the names of two men who have expressed a willingness to cooperate and turn over the titles when the community is in agreement on how to do this. In February at a community meeting the majority decided to divide up the land into 153 family lots, each with its own title, with the stipulation that these individual lots will not be sold for 10 years. The U.S. donors hope that this provision will prevent, or at least delay the ancient pattern of families falling into debt and selling their land to big outside landlords. The completion of the land titling project will need our prayer and financial support!

**Spiritual Life** In the years we have known Valle Nuevo, there has not been a priest assigned to these villages that is sympathetic to their pain and their history as



refugees returning from exile in Honduras. On March 18 we commemorated with them the 20th anniversary of their flight from the Salvadoran Army and their escape over the Lempa River into Honduras. For the first time the community did not celebrate this event with a 10-kilometer pilgrimage to the Lempa River. Some of the older ones who are able to remember back 20 years are finding it harder to make the trek. They also complained that many of those under 20 didn't respect it as a solemn remembrance, but used it as a picnic to swim and drink. This year the community remembered the 18th of March with drama, ballads and speeches. Fifty Hondurans came across the river to participate in the day's activities.

Father Luis, the new priest assigned to the parish, seems to be "a priest after the order of Romero." He was present to walk with the people through the Stations of the Cross, despite his asthma and the necessity of a neck brace after a car accident. Father Luis spoke sympathetically of accompanying a group returning to the site of a massacre. In contrast, the previous clergyman had tried to urge folks in Valle Nuevo to just forget the wrongs done to them and the struggle for change. Father Luis, however, said the nation which doesn't learn from its history is doomed to

repeat its errors. His words and presence expressed his commitment to be with the people on their spiritual pilgrimage. After hearing Father Luis introduce the Way of the Cross, Yvonne Dilling commented to Ruth Anne Friesen, "Perhaps our prayers are being answered!" We were amazed to hear that he is also promising to come from Villa Victoria to the local chapel every Sunday afternoon for mass. Let us continue to pray that the spiritual life at Valle Nuevo will be renewed by someone who can be in solidarity with the poor.

**Health Project** It's exciting to see the people working on a multi-faceted health project organized by CARE—installing dry composting latrines, doing vaccinations, and bringing running water to each house. We saw many people digging trenches to lay water pipes to their homes. Many expressed gratitude for the spirit of co-operation in the community. It appeared that people were well organized to do the various parts of the project, and of course, having water flow right into a *pila*, (small cistern and sink) near one's own house was the main motivation for all the hard work to improve the health care of the community.

**Father Luis,  
the new priest  
assigned to  
the parish, seems  
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of Romero."**

**Earthquake Effects** About 25% of homes in the nation have been damaged or destroyed by earthquakes earlier this year. There was relatively little damage to houses at Valle Nuevo. Those which were affected were mostly of earthen materials—adobe or mud and lath. Half of our delegation traveled one day to areas harder hit by the multiple earthquakes to assist in the distribution of blankets and food supplies. We were challenged to see the extent of the damage, to hear the stories of what had happened and how people were affected. There is much rubble to be cleared. It appears that the effects of the quakes will be felt for a long time. Some of the first steps are getting emergency food, clothes, and housing to those in dire need!

**Connecting with Children** One morning several persons in our delegation jour-



Father Luis, the new parish priest for Valle Nuevo.

Richard Friesen

## Shalom Connections

*Shalom Connections* seeks to glorify God and provide a means of fellowship and inspiration among sisters and brothers of the member churches of Shalom Mission Communities, and the wider network of intentional Christian communities. *Shalom Connections* is published quarterly in March, June, September and December by Church of the Sojourners, 866 Potrero Ave, San Francisco, CA 94110-2841. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of *Shalom Connections*, Church of the Sojourners, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches. **Postmaster:** send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below. Non-profit standard mail postage paid at San Francisco, CA 94188.

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Jack Bernard

# John Alexander

## In the Hands of a Loving God

Mike Creeger  
Church of the Sojourners

John Alexander was born on October 2, 1941 in Kansas. He died on Good Friday, April 13, 2001 in San Francisco. Between the simple noting of those facts is 59 years of a life lived distilling the one true purpose: to live in the grace of God and grow into the full measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

After high school, John went to Oxford on scholarship and earned degrees in Philosophy and Psychology, and married his partner for life, Judy. In the 60's he taught at Wheaton; fathered a son, Roger, and started,

with his father, the *Other Side* magazine, which he later edited for many years, and for which he continued to write a column every issue until his death. He worked for National Liberty Foundation and started Jubilee Fund and Jubilee Crafts while part of Jubilee Fellowship in Philadelphia. He also helped produce a daughter, Jenny.

When the 80's came, he wrote *Your Money or Your Life*, and the family relocated to Shiloh Community in Oregon, followed by a move to Church of the Servant King in Los Angeles. In the 90's he was at Church of the Sojourners as a visionary pastor. He wrote *The Secular Squeeze* and began honing his deepening understanding of the pervasive, compelling, consuming grace of God in Christ. His latest book started out with the title *Stop Going to Church (And Become the Church)*, but as John began to direct his focus more and more to the centrality of God's love, he rewrote the book from that deeper understanding, and at the time of his death the book's working title on his computer was *The Love Book* (though his actual new title was *The Normal Christian Life: Growing into the Full Stature of Christ*).

It was also in the late 90's when John

› John Alexander cont on p.5



# For Those to Whom You Have Given So Much

J. B. Smith  
Hope Fellowship

On my last night in Valle Nuevo, I held a flashlight for Vitelia and her three kids, and we walked down a dusty road toward home. We sang a song about their country, with those enigmatic words about a little bird that can't be held back. "*Dale Salvadoreño, que no hay pajarito pequeño, que despues alzar el vuelo se detenga en su volar.*"

We had been singing it up on the porch at Tomasa's, where our delegation met each day and night for dinner and conversation. Now my hosts and I were high on nothing but hot chocolate and fellowship, so peculiar between people who are so different.

**I could no longer see El Salvador as just another Third World country with a sad history of repression and poverty.**

The roosters, dogs and turkeys were clearing their throats for their all-night cantata, and the *chicharras de Pascuas*—cicadas that are said to die at Easter—were droning like an air-raid siren. No streetlamps shine in this remote corner of El Salvador, and the stars appeared close enough to reach out and pick off the trees. With my flashlight and my clunky Spanish, I pointed out Orion and Cassiopeia to the kids, and told them the constellations were the same in Texas. And I marveled how this once-exotic place had taken its place in my own sky.

I knew that somehow, a week in this village of dirt farmers, these resettled refugees of a brutal civil war, had changed me. I could no longer see El Salvador as just another Third World country with a sad history of repression and poverty.

When I think of El Salvador, I see Vitelia on her porch, telling me of her

midnight crossing 20 years ago. With the death squads close behind, she loaded her six-month-old into a basket, like Moses, and floated him across the Lempa River into Honduras. I see the children, chasing chickens and soccer balls, dust settled in their hair and crusted around their mouths. Jerber, 12, asking me to draw his daddy's horse, then tracing my drawing. Orlando, also 12, with his bristly hair and big eyes, reading a religious comic book with me and forcing me to explain the Trinity in Spanish.

I see a family, living in shame and sadness, whose children were born with defects. In the hammock lies an eight-year-old boy the size of a baby. The father said the boy "has no bones." I feel his arm, thin as a cane.

I see Tomasa, with the heavy-lidded eyes that have wept at the graves of four sons fallen in war. I see the fire rekindled in those eyes as we visit San Salvador and pay homage to her hero, the slain Archbishop Romero. Long ago, he had promised that the glory of God would shine over these ruins. I think of her blessing on our group of Americans after dinner one night: "Lord, for these to whom you have given so much, I pray that you will give more."



Felix and Tomasa, Valle Nuevo, El Salvador

Richard Friesen

I see a town living on nothing but corn and beans and hope. I see a people hanging on in a land abused and choked with trash, a people trying to sew up the cloth even as it rips. By now, it is the rainy season. The dust has no doubt given way to mud. The brown earth will turn green; tomatoes, corn, beans, and squash will grow. Easter has passed, ending the cicada song.

I am under Texas skies again, well-fed, sleeping on a soft mattress in a big apartment. I work at a computer and drive to work in a nice car. But I fear that I have been knocked slightly off course. I am thinking about Tomasa's prayer, and I am trying to find out what she meant. ©



Again the Lord spoke. "Richard, I see you as a leader of leaders, a teacher of leaders and a man of incredible focus." As I pondered the words I realized that I did not see myself as a leader of leaders or a teacher of leaders. Even though I had been in leadership since my freshman year of college when I was elected president of the local Inter-Varsity chapter, I felt uneasy about being a leader. I grew up in a family of farmers and factory workers. Out of the ten children in my family, I am the only one who finished college.

**Growing Leaders will teach small groups of 5-7 people how to give leadership to families, churches and workplaces though listening deeply, envisioning new ways for people to connect and thrive, and handing out refreshing drinks of encouragement.**

In the summer of 1968 I detailed used cars that arrived as trade-ins at a Chevrolet dealership. In early August rheumatoid disease rolled over me with a vengeance. I kept working because I had two weeks to go before starting my senior year of high school. My right knee had contracted and I couldn't straighten it out. My ankles ballooned. My hands ached.

The manager viewed my disintegrating body and began calling me Limpy Louie. His behavior fit perfectly with my family's understanding of leaders. Leaders are people who don't know how to do the actual work and make life miserable for those who do.

In the summer of 1999 I began to write a series of poems to fit together the Lord's vision of me as "leader of leaders and a teacher of leaders" with my rural childhood. In the fall of 1999 I arrived at "yes" to the Lord's vision. I wrote a proposal to offer a leadership course at Plow Creek and listed six texts that I would draw from in the course. During the members meeting Rick Reha asked, "Have you read all these books?"

"Yes," I said. "For years I've read leadership, management and business books just

for fun."

"That tells me something," he said.

I've offered the course twice to Plow Creek since then and I've discovered I love teaching leadership. When I finish a 90-minute class I have more energy than at the beginning.

Missions 2000 wrapped up in April 2001 and I've turned my focus to creating a leadership training institute called Growing Leaders. Its mission is "to lead, teach and liberate leaders to grow organizations where individuals thrive in hope, peace and justice."

Growing Leaders will teach small groups of 5-7 people how to give leadership to families, churches and workplaces though listening deeply, envisioning new ways for people to connect and thrive, and handing out refreshing drinks of encouragement. I firmly believe that every organization needs multiple leaders who listen, envision and encourage well.

I am developing the curriculum drawing on 20 years of being a pastoral elder at Plow Creek, 20 years in various administrative positions at a non-profit, directing two major fund raising campaigns, three years of consulting with other organizations, and leading my family for 27 years. I am also drawing on extensive reading in leadership, management and related fields.

To give you a taste of the course, here are topics included in the listening section:

- Listening to God
- Listening to yourself, including your body
- Listening to others
- The best way to let another person know you've listened
- Writing your personal mission statement
- Listening to what you don't want to hear
- Listening to the opposition
- When not to listen
- ...and much more.

I envision the course will be offered primarily through churches. The Growing Leaders staff would train others to teach the course in order to multiply itself. In addition, I see Growing Leaders publishing books, articles, a newsletter and a web site. I also expect that Growing Leaders would consult with organizations on growing leaders.

Currently I hope to take a sabbatical in 2002 from Plow Creek eldering and from most of my consulting work in order to write my memoir as a leader and to write the curriculum for the Growing Leader course.

If you want to know more about Growing Leaders you can contact me at (815) 646-6600 or e-mail me at richfoss@theramp.net. To be added to a list for periodic e-mail updates on Growing Leaders, e-mail me and ask for the Growing Leaders Update.

The vision for Growing Leaders has emerged from listening to the Lord. I'm going to keep listening to see what divine tricks he has to lead Growing Leaders from vision to reality. ©



Anne Gavitt



› **Zoe's El Salvador** cont from p.11

but must have years and cycles of faithful struggle embedded in it. The following poems are a very small bouquet of what I have been able to gather from my time in Valle Nuevo, at the Romero anniversary events, in earthquake-devasted towns, and just amongst the people of The Savior.

**Keep the Plate**

As we were leaving, a man  
who had received one of our boxes  
came running after us  
with a plate of hot tortillas.  
The plate was painted with flowers and was made of tin,  
no doubt accounting for its survival  
when neither his house nor his daughter had succeeded.  
Keep the plate if you like, he said,  
dwarfing our small act of generosity  
with his giant one.

**He Was Our Voice**

Teresa and Tomasa were surprised that it was not assumed  
we would ALL stay up all night for the vigil for Monseñor Romero.  
"It's not too much to stay up one night, once a year, for our pastor,"  
Teresa said,  
as if the rest of the year she slept in on a velvet cushion, waking  
with a luxurious stretch  
whenever she felt herself to be sufficiently rested.

**El Polvo**

The dust is singular and everywhere.  
The houses are made of it, packed together,  
baked and coaxed into cooperating,  
until the very earth shakes and calls it down again.  
Dust to dust.  
It lies thickly everywhere, filling the air and the nostrils,  
waiting to become something else,  
as neutral as money;  
as ready as love.



› **Growing Leaders** cont from p.2

try since I enjoyed fundraising. Members asked, "What ministry?" since Plow Creek had no such ministry. I said I didn't know, but since I like fundraising, I'd like to use my skills closer to where my heart is—serving the Lord at Plow Creek.

Soon after I resigned from HH, I received a call at 10:00 one night while I was in bed. Allan Howe from Reba Place was calling because he had heard I liked to do fundraising. Allan, the Mission and Service Director for the Illinois Mennonite Conference, described how IMC and the Men-

nonite Board of Missions had formed a partnership called Missions 2000 to raise \$600,000 over three years for nine local and global missions. He wanted to talk to me about being the director.

As we talked on the phone I sensed this call was not only from Allan but also the Lord. Missions 2000 would meet a need for IMC and connect me with the missions arm of the Mennonite church, conference leadership and with Illinois Mennonite mission supporters—connections that would be helpful in my long term desire to raise funds for a Plow Creek-based ministry. I also sensed my dreams of having writing time slipping

away.

Half an hour later I hung up the phone and said, "God, this is a dirty trick."

Dirty trick or no, God knows best. In the first year that I was directing Missions 2000, Plow Creek more than doubled in size. The Lord had taken his people at Plow Creek on a journey from surviving to thriving.

Needless to say, I was once again complaining. "Lord, why are you having me do another campaign? Lord, how can I possibly do all the things required to direct Missions 2000 and carry an increased work load as an elder at Plow Creek?"

**The Crossing of the Rio Lempa**

"The church's task in each country is to make of each country's individual history a history of salvation."  
—Monseñor Romero, December 11, 1977

*When the Lord brought your fathers out from under the hand of slavery, you came to the waters, and your enemies pursued you with chariots and horsemen as far as the edge of the water. But you cried out to the Lord for help, and he put darkness between you and your pursuers; he brought you across the water to safety. Then you lived in the desert for a long time. Let us rejoice in the Lord!*

Each day we read scripture together, it seemed to me the Psalms leaped into the present.  
To read with Teresa,  
*The LORD is a refuge for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble is to read it with power.*  
To hear her read in halting Spanish,  
*Those who sow in tears will reap with songs of joy*  
*or When the LORD brought back the captives to their land, we were like ones who dreamed.*

*The LORD has done great things for us, and we are filled with joy is to feel that Today, these scriptures are fulfilled in our hearing.*  
Yes, poverty and greed still stalk the land  
and with some eyes, nothing changes.  
But the triumph Romero preached was not  
*We hope God will prevail*  
*but God prevails!*  
For me to say this from my armchair in a land of plenty is one thing;

for Teresa to proclaim it from her knees in the Salvadoran dust is entirely another.  
When the Israelites crossed the Red Sea to safety, and their enemies were thwarted,  
this event became the one picture to stand forever  
of God at work amongst them. Over and over,  
it is invoked to remind, to cajole, to inspire a people:  
*God is with you.* ©

› **John Alexander** cont from p.3

had several surgeries that were marked by slow recoveries due to blood clotting problems. Early in 2001, tests revealed acute leukemia.

Doctors were hopeful and so were we at COS when John went into the hospital for chemotherapy on Ash Wednesday. When the therapy was completed, we rejoiced because tests revealed no sign of the leukemia. Again, recovery was slow, as we waited for John's white blood count to get back to normal ranges. Prayer that had been going on regularly now became fervent. Judy was spending every available minute at John's bedside. Others in our fellowship spelled her as overnight stays became more needed. John was weakening in body, but his soul was gaining strength and assurance. It wasn't long before it was difficult labor for him to talk, but he could listen. So people read to him or he listened to books on tape or music. Leaders of our fellowship anointed him with oil and prayed. Psalm 46, John's favorite, was writ large and taped to the wall in his hospital room, where it provided sustenance for patient and visitors alike (perhaps hospital staff too; you never know...). We were getting more and more concerned and tired, but we continued to seek God's help for John's sake and ours. Brothers and sisters at Grace Fellowship Church joined with us in prayer and spending time with John when needed. The open-ended support of those folks was and continues to be a source of refreshment for us.

On Palm Sunday, as we remembered the joy of the disciples, we also remembered John's struggle to gain strength, a struggle he was losing. By Maundy Thursday, John was losing consciousness and gaining pain. As we hoped for a miracle, the vigil continued.

On Good Friday, we were all called to the hospital to say good-bye. In small groups, we visited with John, to speak to him, to touch him, to cry over him, to say "God be with you!" At about 9:00 p.m. about 25 of us entered John's room and sang a few hymns, read some scripture and prayed. Leaving the room, we knew it would be the last time we would see John alive in our world. Within a couple of hours he was with the Lord.

Saturday night's meditations on the Stations of the Cross, which has become a Holy Week tradition for us here, made profoundly emotional connections between the agony of Christ on the cross and the suffering we had witnessed John endure. Easter Sunday brought a strange, powerful combination of

grief and joy. With the risen living Savior among us, we sang of Christ's victory over death and that truth was suddenly an absolute necessity. We were overwhelmed with a kind of hopeful sadness. That afternoon, we began work on a quilt to wrap John in and purchased materials to build a pine casket. The material for that quilt and two others came from John's familiar old clothes.

The creating of the quilts turned out to be a great unifying event. Judy's willingness to give up John's clothes, the clothes she (and we) had seen him wear countless times, was very moving. Creativity and work became gifts of love as pieces of pants, shirts and socks were re-formed into quilt squares representing memories of John. (One square was made entirely of holes—the places in his jeans or shirts which had worn clean through—patched together in a ragged "holy" design that was very John.)

A memorial service was set for Wednesday at Grace Fellowship. We had just enough time to complete the casket. With ten of us participating in the casket's construction, it became a labor of love and fellowship. The life experience of planning, grieving, measur-

ing, sawing, remembering, gluing, fastening, laughing, carving and crying was salve for our grieving souls. One of the last things done on the casket was the inscription of a favorite hymn title of John's, IT IS WELL WITH MY SOUL, which was also one of the songs we had sung to him on that last Friday night.

Wednesday was a tearful remembering with glorious hymn singing. Friends and family from around the country shared memories. The service closed with the voice of John on tape as he delivered a blessing to his flock. After the service, a meal was served upstairs and believers from different traditions and different parts of the country spent time getting acquainted and rejoicing in the victory of God. Even in death, God was accomplishing one of John's great joys, which was having God's people be and live in unity and grace.

I'm sure I wasn't the only one who was remembering one of John's oft-spoken phrases: "We are in the hands of a loving God, and all will be well." Thanks be to God, all will be well! ©



Jodi Thompson



# Church News

## News from Waco

Ruth Boardman-Alexander  
Hope Fellowship

We began our "Year of Peace" with a Men's Retreat the first weekend in January. It was a blessing having John Alexander of COS lead that retreat and the time with him and also Judy now seems even more precious in retrospect. The reality that John is no longer with us is still hard to grasp. We were grateful that Lauren and Dale Barron, who had planned a trip to San Francisco after Easter, were able to be part of the memorial for John there.

In March the Gissler family moved into the neighborhood, just a hop and a skip from both Cristina Dominguez and her family and the Torres family. Around that time we also officially welcomed the Gisslers into church membership.

JB Smith participated in the trip to Valle Nuevo in March (look for his reflections on the trip in this issue). We were glad to have someone from Hope Fellowship be part of that trip for the first time.



Jim and Maria Snyder visited Mennonite pastors Conrado and Esther Hinojosa in San Juan, Texas to brainstorm long range plans for a women's retreat to be held in Matamoros next winter.

Our Easter Retreat, despite the sad news we received about John Saturday morning, was a good time for our church. Almost all of the twelve families were there for the weekend of camping, singing, eating, canoeing, kite making, and just hanging out together. We had a glorious early morning service



Del Christianson and Jim Fitz (l to r) check the health of Plow Creek's strawberry plants.

and the kids enjoyed an egg hunt before we feasted on breakfast burritos and fruit.

On Saturday morning during the retreat we took time to discuss finances and stewardship. We were able to be very open with one another and to come to an agreement that we affirm tithing, that we consider our possessions to be for the use of the kingdom and that no one among us should be in need. In May we had another meeting to talk about the nuts and bolts of our diminishing church funds.

We have made progress in looking at our stewardship, the church's corporate funds, and ways to share more significantly with each other. Currently we are discussing how to highlight the need for giving and how it relates to worship.

We have also begun meetings of parents to work out expectations and guidelines for our children during free-play time at the Meeting House. This is part of our "living life together" that helps us grow as we work through it. Another part of our intertwined lives is that of illnesses. In April we had a stomach virus that tore through our small church community, but we did survive!

Many of our members will be traveling over the next few months. We are especially excited that Cristina Dominguez and her children, Luz and Emanuel, will be able to spend several weeks in Mexico. Cristina has not visited Mexico for nine years because of her immigration status here in the United States. She was recently given permission to travel to see her family.

Norma Torres has been nominated as

co-pastor to join Joe and Nancy Gatlin on the pastoral leadership team. During May and June Norma wants to consult with all members about her candidacy, her concerns and thoughts.

In June we will begin "Wellness and Wisdom" classes for mothers, coordinated by Ria Snyder.

We rejoice that Barbara Bridgewater is experiencing a lessening in her depression.

We anxiously await the birth of the Barron Baby Boy who is due in July, upping the child to adult ratio by one more!



## News from Monroe

Craig Patchin  
Wooden Bridge Christian Community

Things are pretty crazy at Wooden Bridge Christian Community right now. There are two houses going up on the hill next to Cooks—one for AJ and Jim Nich-



How Reba Apartment deals with really big roaches.

hardest part for me. But as I take the distress I hear, and my own accompanying distress to Jesus, he often comes through in amazing ways. Most of these stories can not be told because of confidentiality, but my journal is full of them like the journals of many others I know.

As Paul tells it, this treasure in earthen vessels is the amazing realization that when we bear each others burdens there comes a point where we see the glory of God shining in each other's faces, the promised presence of Jesus. Once we look at each other in this light, in the midst of our brokenness and struggle, we are amazed to find that we are utterly different from one another, and yet the same in Jesus. Likewise, once we really get to know our community close up, we realize how near we are to the possibility of corporate failure, and also how miraculous is our ongoing existence supplied by the love that comes from Jesus.

Jesus came in mortal flesh. He came with hope for a new creation in this world of people and institutions where we toil

in sweat and tears for a justice that always eludes us. But He has called us to be vessels for His life, poured out for community. And He keeps refilling our jug as often as we turn to him in spirit and truth.

I like the qualities of a jug. The craftsman who made it understood its purpose well. A jug has boundaries, an inside and an outside. It preserves something of value. It requires some care. It does not try to be heroic; it only holds two gallons. It can only serve one person at a time, and when it is empty, that's all. There is also no limit to the number of times it can be emptied and refilled.

Earthen jugs, unlike china or glazed pottery, are ordinary, rough and relatively cheap. Their water slowly seeps out and the air slowly breathes in. But in this gently porous quality lies their extra-ordinary gift—the water they share is clean, cool and always fresh.

"So death is at work in us, but life in you." II Corinthians 4:12

# Zoe's El Salvador

Observations of a Clumsy, Comfort-Drowned American Upon a Brief Yet Close Encounter with the Suffering, History, Hope, Daily Life, and Hospitality of Some Salvadorans

Zoe Mullery  
Church of the Sojourners

*"You were born to an island of greed and grace where you have this sense of yourself as apart from others. It is not your right to feel powerless."* from "Return," by Carolyn Forché

I remember a poem of the war by Carolyn Forché in which a colonel empties out for his horrified guest a bag of ears he has collected from people he has tortured, a bag of ears which are dried like dried peach halves, and he puts one in water and it springs into a hideous lifelikeness, a false resurrection.

I am looking for an image which is equal and opposite: not a dead ear cut off in violence being transformed to a facsimile of life which is not life at all, but something which has passed through death but is returned in fact to fullness of life. An image of post-war, post-earthquake El Salvador, an image which can bear the watermark of hope as I encountered it there, faint but perfectly visible when held up to the light.

I suppose what I'm talking about is, really, the Christian story, and the fact that this small, humble, proud country is named The Savior is a poetic dimension which is not lost on me nor on many poets and artists who have sung El Salvador's story.

But I am looking for my own, small, private image, as small as an ear, and since I have not yet found a single image which can stand against those dried-up ears and their message of evil, I sift through several partial images which can hold pieces of the story for me. One of the problems is that destruction is quick and easily accomplished; restoration is most often excruciatingly slow, painful, requiring patience and faith. So perhaps an image which could parallel the ears in hope will not be so compact and elegant,

» *Zoe's El Salvador* cont on p.12

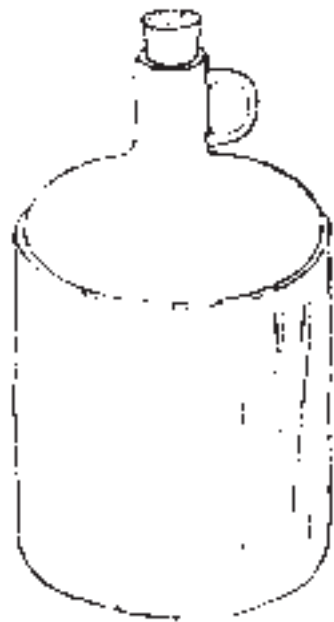


# A Jug, a Dog and Thou

## An Editorial

David Janzen  
Reba Place Fellowship

In haying season on the farm, we thought we would die under the blazing summer sun as my brother drove the tractor pulling the clanging hay baler, and I stacked 108 heavy itchy bales in a precise pattern on each wagon. But at the end of the field under the last hay wagon was our plan for relief. There, in the shade, our panting dog waited for us beside a jug of farm-pump water.



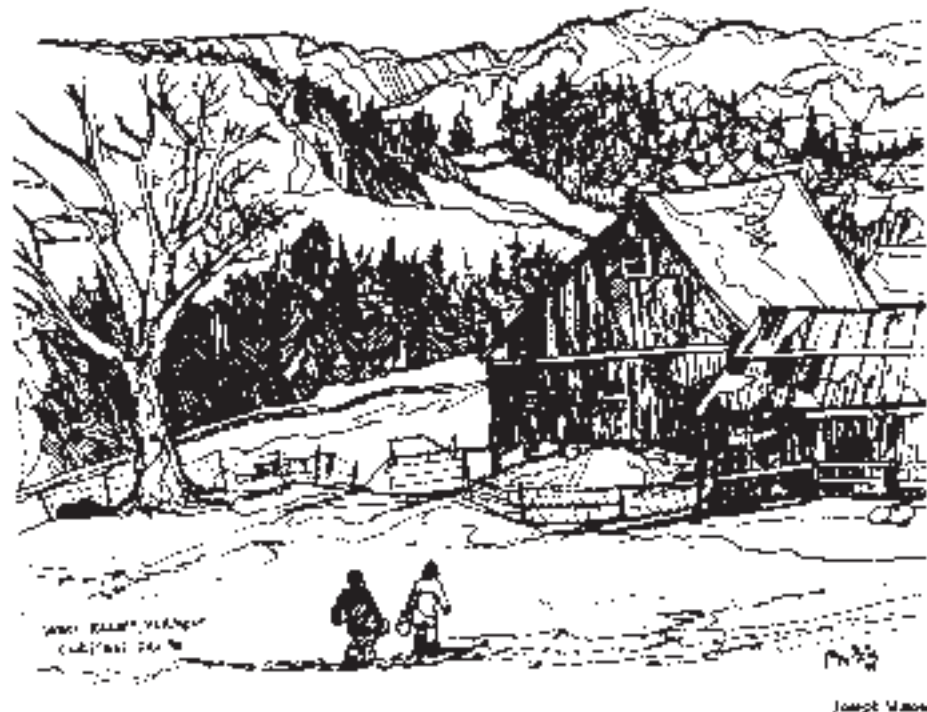
Our hefty two-gallon jug was wrapped in a coarse burlap bag. We had soaked the bag so that it would transpire in the hot breeze and keep the water cool. With a neat technique I'd learned from an older cousin, I poked my forefinger into the handle, turned the jug onto my bent right elbow, pulled the cork, and with one arm expertly hoisted the spout to my mouth. Even when the temperature soared to 105 degrees, I could count on a long pull of fresh cool water to revive my body and my courage. Once my thirst was quenched, I'd take off my baseball cap and pour a stream onto my hair and down my neck to drench my bare torso before

another hour in the sun. Then we'd pour a little stream for our dog to lap up in mid-air. After an hour of misery we shared a feeling of elation over being alive and growing stronger through what we had worked on together.

Now, forty-five years later, I don't labor under a hot Kansas sun. Rather I have the calling of building community—or more often, repairing community—or more exactly, loving persons who make up community. I begin the day hoping to get to the necessary work of administration that lays on my desk, and by the end of the day I have often failed to do my work. But I will have listened to any number of persons whose lives seem on the verge of either breaking down or breaking through.

**By God's grace, I have become a jug filled with cooling water for someone's hot and weary day.**

Again I feel like I'm toiling on a hot day behind a hay baler, stacking heavy, itchy bales of distress on a pile, higher and higher before God. I have no expertise to offer. At the end of an hour I am exhausted, and yet strangely elated. I have been privileged to come close to another soul who is often able to see some hope again and, with very little suggestion from me, has come to a vision of what God would have him or her do next on



the path toward reconciliation and healing. By God's grace, I have become a jug filled with cooling water for someone's hot and weary day. But Paul says it much better:

"We have this treasure in earthen jars, so that it may be made clear that this extraordinary power belongs to God and does not come from us.

We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed; always carrying in the body the death of Jesus so that the life of Jesus may also be made visible in our bodies.

II Corinthians 4:7-10

I have wondered why it is so important to Paul that we give ourselves to the limits of our strength, that we die for one another, and that we are revived in our bodies. He continues in verse 11, "For while we live, we are always being given up to death for Jesus' sake, so that the life of Jesus may be made visible in our mortal flesh."

I find that, when I am listening to a distressed soul, as long as I come with some idea of what she needs, or keep searching for some answer to her problem, I am not really paying attention. I am searching for a formula that will save me from the soul-stretching work of loving this person as he really is. Dying to my own short-cut answers or my own need for efficiency is often the

olson, and one for the Patchins. We are moving out of our side of the barn when it is done, and a family of four, the Whitemans, are moving in.

Our daughter, Bethany, and her husband, Sam, bought a house in South Wayne, WI (about 15 minutes away) and are expecting their first child this fall. Tammy and I are very excited to be grandparents! Sam is the art and layout editor for Touchstone Magazine. Bethany and he are doing freelance writing and working on a book that Eerdmans has agreed to publish. Our second daughter, Christy, will be leaving in the fall to attend Luther College in Decorah, IA. Our other two children are home-schooling, growing like weeds, and looking forward to the summer.

The Cook family has grown by three with addition of a trio of brothers from Ethiopia—lots of adjustments, but things seem to be going pretty well. Pray for an extra measure of patience and energy for Kathy and Dave [Cook]!



## News from Tiskilwa

Louise Stahnke  
Plow Creek Fellowship

Michele Cutts, a member here for two years, has an aggressive form of abdominal cancer. She is staying at Jesus People while she recovers from surgery. Her daughter Robin and her family are members there. Please keep them in your prayers.

We are considering starting a small bakery business based on the talents of Boo Graham and Louise Stahnke, and hopefully including others. We would like to sell primarily through farmers' market, and by phone order. We would like this to be a part time, at home way of helping with income for the Fellowship.

Rich Foss has finished his work with



Claudia Rodriguez of Valle Nuevo, El Salvador, visiting Plow Creek for the Summer.

Richard Friesen



## News from San Francisco

Debbie Gish  
Church of the Sojourners

Christ has risen! He has risen indeed! Alleluia!

Lent, Good Friday, Easter and Pentecost have all taken on new meaning this year

➤ Church News cont on p.8



Steven Braney, Matt Creeger and Dale Gish (l to r) help work on John Alexander's coffin.

Conrad Yoder



► **Church News** cont from p.7

as we walked with John Alexander through his illness to his death and now walk with his family through this season of mourning. Some of what has happened among us with regard to John is being addressed elsewhere in this newsletter, but to summarize this last season without due mention of John's illness and death would not reflect accurately what has happened amongst us as a congregation. On Ash Wednesday, John entered the hospital. Daily his family and members of the congregation were at his bedside, mostly reading to him his favorite books and scripture or assisting with little tasks. As he weakened, we were with him 24 hours a day until he died on Good Friday. The month of May we set aside as a specific time of mourning, using our regular gathering times to reflect on his life, sing together, listen to his past sermons or writings and the like. Please pray for us as we move forward together into this new season.



While John was hospitalized, Carissa Joy Mast was born on March 31st in the same hospital. What a gift she has been to Luke and Sara Mast and to the rest of the congregation. With the addition of two neighborhood families joining us for worship, we have seven young children in our midst. We are actually in the process of beginning Sunday School, something this congregation of mostly adults has not had to do

during our fifteen years of life together. We are very grateful for the challenge.

Hannah Zazvorka, Zoe Mullery and her father, Mike Mullery, accompanied the delegation to Valle Nuevo during their 20th anniversary celebration of the crossing of the Rio Lempa. It was a profound experience for each, and especially for Mike who is a retired immigration attorney who has represented many Salvadorans seeking asylum in the United States. Just recently we had a community garage sale to raise money for earthquake relief; it was a big success. Hannah is graduating from high school this year and will be remaining with Church of the Sojourners for a year with the hope of doing foster care as a team with her parents.

Doug Selph returned from Rogers Park for a month and will be permanently relocating to Chicago on June 19th to continue his relationship with Lisa Blackwood. It is sad to see Doug move, but we are very excited about their relationship and grateful for the ever-growing partnership and connection with Living Water and Reba.

Our eldest young adult, Steven Braney, went on his Rites of Passage from May 25 to June 2 with Dale Gish and Tim Lockie. They spent a weekend with Community House in Cincinnati sharing common life with them and painting. Then they headed south to Kentucky where they went on a silent retreat at Gethsemane Trappist Monastery. Steven is highlighted in the Getting Acquainted section, and if you know him, silence isn't his forte! (Neither is it Tim Lockie's.) It was an important and challenging week for Steven.

It concluded with a barbecue and blessing time with the whole congregation back in San Francisco.

Our Summer Sojourn is to begin on June 24th. We will have a smaller crew this year but it will include interns from Germany and Russia. Our hope is that our youth and possibly some of the interns will be able to join other SMC youth in Evanston for this year's youth conference and then on to Plow Creek for the camp meeting.

We continue forward in this Year of Listening. With such significant changes come an abundance of feelings—fear, excitement, doubt, anticipation, uncertainty, hope. We covet your prayers in this time. Pray for Judy as she mourns this incomparable loss. Pray for our overseers, that they may lead well by the Spirit as they continue to press forward without John's support and guidance. Pray for our congregation as we seek to listen to the Spirit's leading for our life together. May we continue forward in unity of vision, spirit and love.



## News from Evanston

David Janzen  
Reba Place Fellowship

**Best ever** Reba Place Fellowship has enjoyed a season of coming together beginning with our May 11-13 retreat that many members called our "best ever." We met at Inspiration Center, a facility in Southern Wisconsin, built with an awareness of the needs of persons with physical handicaps and environmental allergies that allowed for our group's maximum participation. We were especially elated that several older members could be with us who had recovered from recent illnesses. Our program included the children into our presence most hours of the weekend with lively participation. God is at work among across the generations.

**Reba founders return with a blessing** John and Louise Miller, who helped found Reba in 1957, joined us for the weekend. "I

feel like someone coming back who is still a part of you," said John. Their stories of God's providence in the Fellowship's origins were heartwarming for old timers and inspiring for those of us who have arrived more lately.

John Miller related how his thinking has evolved since he wrote the seminal Reba pamphlet, "The Way of Love." In recent years John has focused much research on the canonical history of the Bible, especially the Jewish roots of our Christian faith. In a meditation on the Lord's Prayer we saw how closely Jesus followed and adapted the Kadish as it was prayed in the synagogues of his time. New elements Jesus contributed were an anticipation of God's inbreaking kingdom, an intimate relationship with a heavenly Father who cares for us today, and an understanding of the reciprocal forgiveness of sins.

John left us with a lingering blessing. "I see this Fellowship as a unique and authentic expression of God's coming kingdom. It has been the venue for the blessing of God in many people's lives. It was a work of God and I sense it continues to be such." These words could be spoken of almost any gathering of believers, but it is a special grace to have our spiritual parents return and leave such a gift of encouragement.

**From awesome to awful** Our weekend had the usual hilarity of a fun night in which everyone had a part. We came up with original skits and songs that ranged somewhere on a scale from awesome to mostly awful. Picture Adam and Eve after the fall, climbing a fig tree (Anne Gavitt) to pull down the biggest leaves. Or John the Baptist with a bus full of women in outer space—you don't want to go there.

**It is a special grace to have our spiritual parents return and leave such a gift of encouragement.**

An image we all take home from the retreat was when our leader allowed his two-year-old son, Ransom to sing into the microphone for a minute. Then Greg followed with a little homily on what it might mean for us to become like little children in order to enter the kingdom of God. Children grow and thrive on loving attention, becoming all they were created to be in a healthy community. Our life together can be a feast of

love, feeding on one another and on Jesus present among us.

**How can we love you best?** The best part of the weekend for many of us was the time we took to pair up and interview a partner with the question, "How can we be loving you best?" As we shared the results of these interviews, it turns out most of us really like to be listened to. Our attention for one another is a sacrament in which Jesus is present. Following communion Sally and Linas prayed for us all, one by one, to be renewed in our mission to love others.

**Memorial Day at Camp Lake** On Memorial Day a score of us, including quite a few guests, gathered at our perpetually-decaying Emmanuel Lodge in Wisconsin for a morning of painting and clean-up. Barb Grimsley and Sue Flecke conquered their fear of heights by painting the south peak of the house. David Janzen took measurements for a new dock while our retired engineer, Linas Brown, observed that the current dock he designed had lasted fifteen years.

By noon the hamburgers were grilling and we kicked back to enjoy the holiday with each other. The spirits of cooped up city folks expanded into the open air as some took long walks with friends to catch up on visiting. Two games of bocci ball had some of us exploring the yard for a while. Just as we were ready to leave a stately green heron landed 50 paces from us in the lake, poised to fish while more and more of us gathered to gaze in awe. Finally he flew off with long slow beats and we returned to the city refreshed.

**A Visitation** On May 31 five visitors came to join us for a community review—Jeff and Laura Hare, and Judy Alexander from Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, and Richard and Judy Hays from Durham, North Carolina.

We have compared a visitation to a com-

munal spiritual checkup. On the opening evening Greg Clark had us reflect on other visitations in the Bible—Gabriel coming to Mary and the angels telling Abraham about Sodom's destruction. What will it be—good news or judgment?

For three days our five visitors spread out, interviewing individuals, meeting with leadership, and helping us conduct meetings on sticky agenda. Issues that got special attention included elder care, the relationship between Fellowship and congregation, growing needs and shrinking resources, and how much autonomy is right for the small group living in Rogers Park.



Jacob Belser teaches Barb Grimsley how to spin a giant Yo-Yo.

On our final evening Richard Hays commended three Bible texts to help us focus our calling as a Fellowship. First there was Abraham and Sara who, in their old age were promised a son and a people to follow. Then there was Gideon whose army, God said was too big. Finally we were pointed to II Corinthians 4: 12-16 with the image of a priceless treasure in earthen vessels. What a gift to be visited by God's messengers, known and cared for with counsel that meshed so solidly with our particular history and calling for the future.



An impromptu hymn sing at Camp Lake on Memorial Day.