

Book Notes

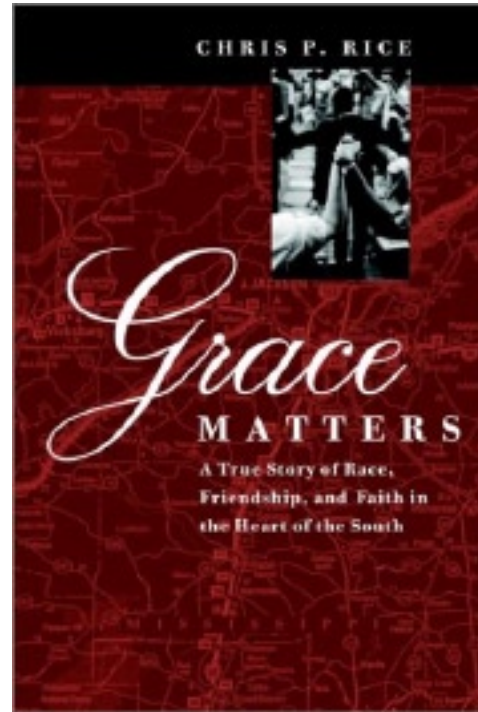
Grace Matters—A True Story of Race, Friendship, and Faith in the Heart of the South

By Chris P. Rice, 336 Pages, published by JosseyBass.

I'm sure many reading this newsletter know Chris Rice, or know of him. His newest book has just come out, and it sounds wonderful, and certainly pertinent to the adventure we are all on.

Following is the blurb put out by the publisher. Look for a review in the next issue. If you read the book and would care to comment on it in these pages, write to zoemullery@aol.com.

In *Grace Matters*, we follow the remarkable journey of Chris Rice, a naive white college student from Vermont, transformed into



an insightful man of faith who helped form a thriving interracial community in Jackson, Mississippi. Chris Rice's compelling story uncovers the wounds that divide the races and reveals what it takes to bring blacks and whites together, honestly, compassionately, and transcendently.

As a young man in 1981, Chris Rice thought he would take a few months off from his college to join the Voice of Calvary ministry. There he met Spencer Perkins—the eldest son of John Perkins, legendary African American evangelist and civil rights movement activist—and was forever changed. Together, Chris and Spencer and an extraordinary group of ordinary people entered into a bold experiment, creating an interracial faith community called Antioch, after the Mediterranean city where the followers of Jesus first became known as *Christians*. Pooling their resources, this dedicated group of black and white Christians joined forces to realize the vision of the Sermon on the Mount. In so doing they not only enriched their own lives but also those of their inner-city neighbors. ©

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The Inner Logic of Peace

Jack Bernard
Church of the Sojourners

Peace—essential to grasping the gospel It seems kind of odd for me to be addressing a group composed mostly of Mennonites on the subject of peace. I'm actually rather new to a real peace outlook. My personal experience of heroic peacemaking consists of reading e-mails from Christian Peacemaker Team members.

At Church of the Sojourners, we have been studying Matthew since last fall. That study has turned me, in principle, into a pacifist. I've always been sympathetic with peace issues. I've always been clear that, within my memory, the wars of the United States have nothing to do with any just war theory. They have had more to do with imperial boundaries. But, up until very recently, I don't think I would have said that peace is at the core of the Gospel.

The inner logic of peace As we look at Matthew, I want to look not so much at the *commands* of Jesus about peace or the promises of Jesus for peacemakers, but rather



The Peaceable Kingdom

PHOTO BY JEFFREY BROWN

at the inner logic of peace which Jesus is offering us. Jesus often seems to be causing conflict and promising conflict, not peace as we usually think of it. But he exemplifies and points to a way of life which embodies peace in a profound way.

To understand Jesus and his relationship to peacemaking, it helps to understand the historical circumstances into which Jesus was born, lived, and proclaimed the kingdom. The Jews went into exile in 587 BC. Beginning in about 520 BC, they were allowed to come back to the land and the temple was rebuilt. From an outsider's perspective, the exile ended then. And yet even until the time of Jesus,

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Plow Creek Youth Speaks for Peace at 9/11 Memorial Event

Jim Fitz
Plow Creek Fellowship

Every Wednesday several of us from the Plow Creek Mennonite Church have held a noon hour peace vigil at the Courthouse in Princeton, Illinois. On the 11th of September, we went as usual, a little anxious about the kind of a response we might get. But of all days, this seemed to be the one we needed to be there.

We were carrying signs saying, "Pray for Peace, Act for Peace" with a dove on it; "Trust in God, Not in Weapons;" "Don't Attack the People of Iraq;" "Plan Columbia Kills Farmers." A few people gave us "thumbs up" signs. Others just looked away. About 11:45 we noticed people gathering across the street at Soldiers Park to have a memorial service for those who died a year ago. I began to wonder if sparks would fly.

Just then my son, Andy, arrived for the memorial service. He urged us to go across the street and join the gathering there. "You don't want to be disrespectful and look as though you were against them," he said. "We're not against remembering those who died." After talking it over we said it made sense, so we moved across the street. I was praying as we moved closer to a lot of people who might be opposed to what we had to say.



Stahnke and Horning Garden and House at Plow Creek.

Jodi Thompson

But it seemed the right thing to do.

Andy took a sign and joined us there, and then he just walked off to be with some of his high school friends. Well, there were the usual speeches in this kind of event. And then they asked if anyone else would like to say a few words. After a few people spoke, lo and behold, Andy comes to the microphone. I thought, "Oh no, what's he going to say?"

I don't remember everything of his talk, but it went something like this: "Everyone has been talking about 'God bless America' and 'One nation under God.' If we really are under God then we have to look to the Bible and Jesus Christ as our guide. Jesus said we are to love our neighbors, and even our enemies. You can't love your enemies with violence and war." There was a good applause afterwards. Andy's bravery encouraged Jim Foxvog to say a few words, followed by applause again.

There were quite a few students there. Andy said afterwards that he felt the students would probably hear the message better coming from a peer, and maybe adults

would pay more attention when a youth spoke. It was amazing the positive response we got: "God bless you," and, "I'm so glad you're here." A friend who flies a flag at her house came up to me and said, "I don't know what Bush is trying to do."

A reporter asked me what our purpose was and I replied, "We want to get people to pray for peace. Prayer is our strongest weapon. We need to look to God for our security and not to war and weapons." We all wore white that day in response to the suggestion from Global Coalition for Peace, except for Andy who wore a Christian Peacemaker Team shirt with buttons that read "Terrorism and War Are Both Crimes Against Humanity," and "Islam Condemns Terrorism."

The lack of any really hostile response and some positive responses makes me feel people do have questions about the direction our government is moving in urging war on Iraq. Take heart, the Spirit is moving, even if we are unaware, to bring peace on earth. Pray for Peace, Act for Peace. ©

ing God completely. It is not even remotely related to human circumstances of war or the victory of certain nations. As we, the body of believers, live in a state of trusting God, believing in his competence to accomplish the tasks at hand, peace is born in the world.

So trust, or faith (it's the same word), is the essential human response to God, in Jesus' teaching. It's interesting that the only thing Jesus gets really fierce with his disciples about is "Oh you of little faith!" Even when they are haggling over who is most important, he patiently teaches them. He doesn't rebuke them. But on this issue of faith, he is very hard-core with his disciples. Even when Peter is stumbling out of the boat, trying to respond to Jesus, and he sinks trying to imitate Jesus, Jesus still comes back with, "Oh you of little faith." This is the one issue that Jesus is hard on them about, because it is the center of this new humanity that he is calling his disciples into.

Faith transforms us into a new way of acting according to the will of God. When the church lives this way, by its very existence it is the hope of peace for all humankind.

Desperately needed: evidence of this new humanity It is significant that Jesus did not go out of his way to tell the Romans to stop being oppressors. I'm not saying that we should not speak out against injustice. It's just that Jesus' agenda was not that of peace activism to help people get along better. His primary agenda was 1) offering himself up to death at the hands of his enemies, and 2) calling into existence a new community of people that lived without the power of envy, rivalry, grasping and death. So whatever other actions happen, they need to flow out of our being communal examples of this new humanity, which precedes any doing.

Now I realize I am preaching to people who already are trying to do that. I want you to realize that by the very attempt to be a reconciled community of people who do not relate—or at least do not intend to relate—to one another through jealousy, competition, and greed, we are in fact living into who God intends us to be before the world. That kind of community has to be absolutely rooted in trust in God, not by trying to make community happen by some kind of law.

One temptation—especially with new communities—is to try to make community work by some version of purification. "This is what we are trying to do. If you aren't doing it, then leave." This is the world's way of dealing with rivalry, envy, etc. Another

temptation of community is to drift off and become worldly after a few generations, losing the focus on God and on real faith in him. Community becomes the primary culture, rather than trusting God being the centerpiece.

Living the new humanity of Jesus is a defenseless life. It may not look heroic, but it is risky. You really are setting aside all the other choices, all the other good things. You really have to become a person who is not grasping for life, but offering it up.

The fundamental origin of sin is in not trusting God's goodness, his good intentions toward us.

Christian peacemaking must be sacramental A final point I want to make is that all peacemaking, in order to be Christian, needs to be *sacramental*. A sacrament is a physical embodiment of a spiritual reality.

I've been doing some reading into Anabaptist history, some of the founding father theologians of the 16th century, and I was surprised to learn, contrary to what I had been told of Anabaptism, these folks were not all anti-sacramental. They talked about the sacraments, they wrote about sacraments, they defended the sacraments.

They were trying to run between two errors. In the late Middle Ages the Catholic Church had come to this notion that the sacraments had real power of God's grace independent of the faith and obedience of either the priest or the people receiving it—a kind of magic. That is the error the early

Anabaptists were reacting against, an autonomous materialist view of God's grace.

On the other hand, these early Anabaptists were reacting against another serious error they saw, the error of spiritualism. That danger had to do with seeing the Christian faith as something entirely interior, so that God's grace is communicated to us in our little heart of hearts, independent of any outward material elements or actions. It became a completely private thing that ultimately undermined the church. American Christianity tends toward the spiritualist version. "Oh, the peace of Jesus." We can pray and feel the peace of Jesus in our hearts. It is some sort of inner massaging. We can will this peace for the world, yet take no risks for peace in establishing transformed relationships with other people, with our enemies.

A truly sacramental view of peacemaking is both outward and inward. The peacemaking of Jesus is not the same thing as secular conflict resolution that helps people manage their rivalry in order to not kill each other. Jesus offers peace which comes from trusting God, and that is what makes it sacramental—an outward, physical embodiment of faith.

The Gospel of Matthew ends with these words, and I will too. "And remember, I am with you always to the end of the age." Therein lies the real possibility of Christians making peace in the world—the real presence of Jesus among us. ©

Derived from a talk delivered by Jack Bernard at the Shalom Mission Communities camp meeting at Plow Creek Fellowship on August 9, 2002. Jack Bernard is an overseer of the Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco, CA.



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ministry. He was doing things that were understood as Messianic symbols—yet he opposed the national aspirations of Israel.

The command to love and to pray for Israel's enemies, the Romans, was not just arguing against personal racial prejudice. It was, in fact, counter to the moral and religious obligation of every devout Jew as it would have been understood in those days. Jesus was actually standing against the things that they were using to preserve themselves as a nation. Israel was getting sucked up into the dominant Greek culture. Israel's leadership was trying to preserve its identity in Yahweh, and doing it by a fury against the Romans and pagan culture. They took hold of symbolic things, such as the temple, Sabbath-keeping, Torah, and—a

favorite of the Pharisees—ritual purity as identity marks of Israel's faithfulness. In order to understand the forces going on, we need to be sympathetic with their agenda. How could anyone be from God and not support the national causes and the national religious identity?

And yet, Jesus insisted, Israel had replaced trust in God with nationalistic religious zeal, so that these very cherished symbols of temple, Sabbath, Torah, purity of food were actually getting in the way of Israel trusting God. By fighting the messianic battle with divine power and direct action, Jesus forced them to decide if he was in fact from God or from Satan. The dominant leadership chose to kill Jesus and preserve their national program.

Deeply formed by our culture I find it helpful to realize that all human cultures are formed out of rivalry, envy, grasping and the power of death as the ultimate form of control. This is not just our culture. Human culture is essentially an agreed-upon system of ethics and morals in order to keep the violence that arises out of this rivalry, envy, grasping and the power of death from reach-

ing proportions that annihilate us. This is the formative reason for human culture.

I think that Jesus' teachings have absolutely nothing to do with morality or ethics, even though they are usually used that way, so that Christians will be good according to the norms that are expected of them. Jesus is in fact offering and calling us into a whole new way of being human that is *not* rooted in rivalry, envy, grasping and death, but is rooted instead in the imitation of Jesus in his absolute trust in the goodness and trustworthiness of the Father.

We usually think of original sin as: "Adam and Eve broke the command of God and ate the fruit." I don't think so. I'm not ignoring centuries of Christian tradition in this understanding; I just want to point out a deeper dynamic. The original sin was actually not trusting God.

In the garden the serpent said to Eve, "Ah, if you eat the fruit, you're not going to die. God knows that if you eat this fruit you are going to be like him." The implication is that God is holding out on them. God is somehow in competition. And so, Eve takes the fruit. The fundamental origin of sin is in not trusting God's goodness, his good intentions toward us.

God is not rivalrous What Jesus is doing is actually pulling humanity back to that original place in the Garden of Eden in which God is trusted absolutely in his goodness and in his intentions toward us. God is not rivalrous. The only way out of this culture of rivalry, envy, grasping and death is to be profoundly transformed by trusting God in the person of Jesus.

With freedom from this culture of envy, rivalry, grasping and death, a new kind of human community becomes possible that is simply not possible by trying to culturally manage this rivalry stuff with morals and ethics. This new humanity, this new creation of Jesus, is exactly what the church is in the

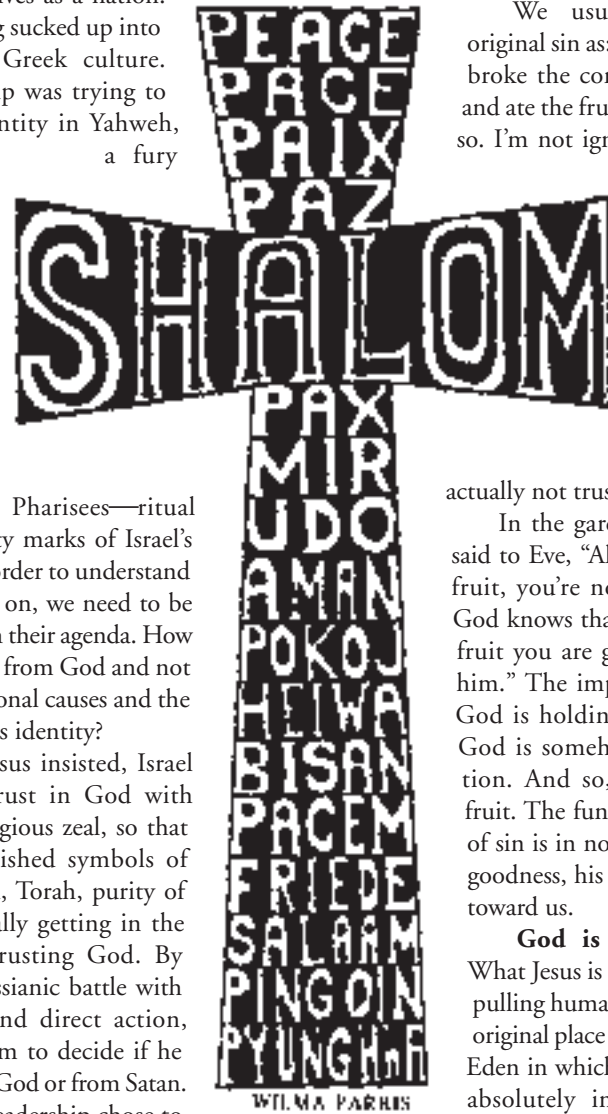
process of becoming. I want to emphasize process, because it is very easy to read a lot of this stuff as "Boom! I get it. Now we're there." But we're not. This new society, formed by an absolute trust in God's goodness toward us, is the extension of Jesus' incarnation in the world. This, by the way, is a very Anabaptist way of understanding the church. We are not just some folks who have cleaned up our morality and stand for good things and not bad things, for peace and not war—in Christ we are a genuinely new humanity.

The losers are the winners Jesus teaches that those who are really blessed are not the winners in the game of rivalry, but the people who are in fact the losers. "Blessed are the poor in spirit... those who mourn... the meek..." The greatest among you is the servant of all, not the one who successfully competes for privilege—a new idea in the history of all human societies, I believe.

Jesus is offering and calling us into a whole new way of being human that is not rooted in rivalry, envy, grasping and death, but is rooted instead in the imitation of Jesus in his absolute trust in the goodness and trustworthiness of the Father.

The power of death is not ultimately in control. In one of Jesus' most astonishing moves he says, "Do not fear those who kill the body, but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell." N. T. Wright is adamant that the person to be feared here is not God, but Satan. The very violence and rivalry, which is the center of Satan's rule, is precisely what can destroy your body and soul in hell. So death is not ultimate. The thing to be most feared is not death. Jesus' enemies could not control him with the threat of death. It is no longer the ultimate trump card.

Resurrection, not stomping your enemies, is the final result of God's approval. And that is not in our hands, it is in God's. So "success" in waging peace cannot be measured in normal human terms. In Jesus' terms, true peace is synonymous with trust-



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Sanding for Jesus

A Play in Several Acts

Tim Lockie
Church of the Sojourners

Sometime last year, Steven Braney, Hannah Zazvorka and I started meeting to discuss what it meant to disciple young men in our group. While we are less than experts on the subject, it was our intent to really ask the questions: what is the message Jesus gave us, how do we live it, and how do we pass it on to our youth group. One Wednesday morning Steven and Hannah told me that they thought one possibility was to plan a trip to Montana to work with our friend Dave Hagstrom. Their vision of the trip was to have a time to spend together, work hard, play hard, and raise the money to do it. During the week we would have devotions and invite Dave to speak to us about discipleship in the kingdom, a topic we felt him to be well qualified to speak about.

Dave runs a small nonprofit organization whose mission is to be the light of Jesus to the small neighborhood where Dave lives. While there isn't much urbanization in Montana, one place where a small amount of urban poverty exists is in the South Side

neighborhood in Billings. Dave was glad to have us come, and gave us a project which would really challenge us. A neighborhood school, Garfield Elementary, had been closed, but the gym was in use all the time by various groups. Dave's idea was to give a gift to the city of Billings by stripping the floor and the bleachers with sanders, and refinishing both. It would send a message to have a group travel a thousand miles to do the work that the district wouldn't do themselves. Dave mentioned that Garfield was a political hot potato, but to us it sounded fine, both big enough to give us plenty of work, but not the kind of work that only one or two skilled people can do.

The trip took on a new flavor when Hannah started talking to Analí Gatlin about the possibility of inviting the SMC youth to participate instead of just San Francisco. Before long there were approximately twenty-five of us planning to descend upon Billings, Montana in late July for a week of work. Hannah, Steven, and I were joined by Kevin Casey on Wednesday mornings as we started to work out the logistics and began fundraising. And sooner than it seemed possible, we were packing up to drive to Montana.

If I were writing a play, that would have been scene one. The lights would dim, and they would light again with all of us in sleeping bags in a large Sunday school room. With poetic license I would skip the fact that Analí, Katie, and the Plow Creek

› *Sanding for Jesus* cont on p.4



Tim Gale (left) and Esther Graham (right) run the sanders, with Abram Hagstrom (behind Tim) and April Dilts (center) cleaning up behind.

Tim Lockie

► *Sanding for Jesus* cont from p.3

Gang showed up on Tuesday instead of Monday and we would all rise, groggy from 22 hours in the car the day before. We'd get breakfast and head over to Garfield school (split stage) where we would walk in to find Dave Hagstrom playing around in a breaker box trying to rig enough electric cords to serve almost 20 power devices. There would be sawhorses everywhere and a small set of bleachers, which we would actually take apart during the play, and a gym floor which we would actually sand. Dave would greet us and start to explain the job, a monologue which would convince the audience of two things: 1) that Dave knew what he wanted done, but 2) had never done it himself and only understood seventy percent of how to get it done. The scene would end with all of us sitting on the bleachers looking at Dave and blinking. Again poetic license; none of us were actually looking at Dave. We were all looking at the floor and calculating its square footage (so what is 100 feet by 100 feet again? What! How many zeros?) or, counting the number of boards attached to the bleachers which needed to be unattached, sanded, varnished and reattached (3 boards per row, 7 rows, and 6 banks of bleachers made 126 boards, which also needed to be labeled to be attached to the bleachers at the same place they were removed).



Tim Lockie

The problem of what to do with the extra sawdust is solved by Tim Otto (holding can) and an unidentified co-conspirator.

The scene would end with all of us sitting on the bleachers looking at Dave and blinking.

The next scene would start with a sound like 200,000 bees swarming. This was the sound of the sanding stations we made to sand the bleachers down to bare wood. Two 40-grit belt sanders, six 60-grit palm sanders, two 80-grit belt sanders, three 100-grit palm sanders, two 100-grit belt sanders, and three 100-grit orbital sanders for a final polishing. On the other side of the scene there would be five sanding machines working on the floor with one person pushing and another sweeping and keeping the electrical cord out of the way. The scene wouldn't be about the work, it would be about the transition of a bunch of city kids becoming proficient at sanding floors and boards. Dave would give the kill sign and once more tell all of the bleacher workers what the bull-nose edge on the face

board is supposed to look like. Two minutes later he would give the kill sign again and explain how we are trying to keep any of the edges from being sharp 90 degrees. The scene would end at the end of the second day with one board completely finished. Poetic license; there were two.

The curtain rises, the work now becomes a backdrop, something we are always doing, and the story starts to examine the relationships. Analí teaches me how to use the sander. She clearly knows what she is doing (not poetic license) and Austin Jones is always in the background working a machine in his striped t-shirt. During a break, while the machines sit idle and we munch on ice cream sandwiches, I explain that my cousin is thinking of joining us for the afternoon and ask that everyone make him feel welcome. He comes in later in that scene with my aunt, the one who has always been skeptical of community. People look up from their machines and wave, or yell, "Hi, James, glad you made it." My aunt asks James if he's ever met any of these people.

Nope. He looks surprised, but he's smiling too. We have a barbecue at the end of the scene, and people pick up a game of soccer. This game is important to the flavor of the play. It shows that the same people that were low on sleep and working to exhaustion are now playing a game of soccer with huge smiles and laughs. At the beginning of the play it mattered where people came from. There was Plow Creek, Sojourners, and Waco. Now there is only here and soccer and James in the middle of the game; a fifteen-year-old playing soccer with kids his own age up to college age. It needs to strike the audience that never before has a group of college-age people outside his family treated him like an equal and not like someone to baby-sit.

Reporters arrive early on in the next scene. They are interested in what we are doing and start videotaping everything. They interview Hannah and Steven, who talk about giving themselves for others. The work goes on behind them: Andy and Ian work on the edges of bleachers, while Dan

seem to change nothing for us.

—Feel only our nation's pain, and feel no pain at our nation's oppression of others.

—Believe that we are powerful enough that we can sow violence and reap peace.

—Spend more on destruction than on construction, and imagine that we are fighting terrorism rather than creating it.

—Judge our country by its highest ideals and judge others by their worst behavior.

—Make "retaliation" and "revenge" holy words.

—Believe we do not need to listen to our enemies.

Heaven or hell I have enough practice denouncing the idolatry of nationalism that this can become an exercise in self-righteousness. Denouncing sin will not save me from hell.

Outside the Reba Church meeting house hangs a banner with the words, *God bless our country, our world, our enemies.* Who are our enemies? I think our enemies are probably the people we are most afraid of and most angry at. What would it mean for God to bless the people we fear and despise? If Jesus thinks it is good for us to pray for such people, I'm willing to try it. Here are prayers that do challenge my spirit to grow.

I have enough practice denouncing the idolatry of nationalism that this can become an exercise in self-righteousness. Denouncing sin will not save me from hell.

God bless America and especially its leaders with an understanding of the tragedy of September 11, 2001, in a way that will unite us with the suffering of the world rather than isolate us and make us more dangerous. God bless those for whom September 11 is a personal reminder of grief and loss. Be near those who feel the responsibility of decisions about our government's direction and security. May they know your love, despite mistakes, and have the courage to seek the things that make for peace. May they know the love that allows them to forgive. Give courage to those who have forgiven and who seek an end to revenge.

God bless the persons who have thrown



Conrad Yoder

"Air Janzen" elevates effortlessly over over his helpless opponent, with Brian Moser (far left) only able to cower in awe.

in their lot with the Taliban, with Al Qaeda, with groups whom our government is hunting down as terrorists. Bless them that their legitimate concerns may actually be heard. May their families have what they need. May they know love that allows them to save face and to change. May they come to grieve the deaths of those they have killed directly or indirectly, and so be united with humanity. May their hearts not be hardened by the burdens of leadership and the deaths that result from their decisions. Lord have mercy on them and on us, for none of us really knows what we are doing.

After praying these two prayers, I discover that the prayer for our leaders and for our "enemies" is actually the same prayer. Which leads me to this vision of heaven and hell in which they are both the same place, populated by the same people. Only some people have forgiven their enemies, and the joy they feel to be reconciled is heaven. Others are forced to spend eternity with those they cannot forgive. For them it is hell.

I have another more beatific vision of heaven—not by imagination, but by direct revelation.

A beatific vision of basketball In early June, this guy who thought he was too old for it bought a basketball and began taking it to Reba Park on lunch breaks or at the end of the workday. His idea was to get sixty-one-year-old legs in shape enough to have a good time with a sport he used to enjoy—and to leave a few pounds of flab on the court. After several weeks his jump shot returned. This

old guy rejoiced, "I can still do everything I used to—except for running, jumping, defense and a few other things like that."

The teenagers began to accept him into their games of "Twenty-one." They dazzled him with their cross-over moves and between-the-legs dribbles. Occasionally he would surprise them by scoring an in-your-face hook shot, and they would put each other down with sarcasm— "You let a grandpa beat you like that?"

By becoming a fixture at Reba Park he has gotten to know a lot of the guys who are half-way into the "gangsta" life and half-way into school—they could go either way. He may be fooling himself, but his times in the park—usually the only white guy on the court—have become a small peace witness that breaks down a few stereotypes folks otherwise carry.

And for this guy, whose body only partly cooperates with his competitive drive, there is a spiritual battle underway. He is learning to let others succeed, to compliment the guy who scores against him, to praise a good pass even if it's on the opposing team. Each time he exits the park, sweaty and with no broken bones he can say, "Basketball is a beautiful game, a warm-up for the courts of heaven!"



› **Getting Acquainted** *cont from p.9*

often sick. In 1964 he and I both had hepatitis. We came to Reba to recuperate while John and Joanna Lehman took our place. A year later the volunteers from Church of Hope came to Reba because Peoria street was bulldozed to make space for the University of Illinois at Chicago campus. At that time Nevin was in the fifth grade, Nina in second grade, and Anne was in kindergarten. We were sad that none of the African-American members of the church moved with us, but I can see why.

“In 1972 we began the household at the Clearing. For a time, just about everyone at Reba lived in big households. I wasn’t too pleased with the charismatic renewal that hit Reba at that time. But I figured, if the gifts of the Spirit are real, we’re sure going to test them in household living. Mina Regier, Neta Jackson, Julius and I began to organize hospitality for all the guests that were coming in those days. Lots of people just showed up at the door. I’ve been Fellowship guest coordinator ever since. I enjoy guests, especially grandchildren and international visitors. I didn’t get to travel much, but it’s been good to have so many people from so many places come to stay with us.

“About twenty-five years ago we tried to count up those who have lived with us for more than three months and it was over a hundred. We don’t have a historian. Who knows how many we’ve lived with by now! I especially remember Eliseo, a refugee from El Salvador who lived with us a year and could make the best meals out of ordinary stuff. Then his family came and now they live down the street. I enjoy hosting Wendell and Jane Sprague who come once a year so Wendell can be everyone’s dentist and Jane can go to the operas in Chicago.

“How do we do it? I still enjoy shopping, which is fortunate, because I do a lot of it. Hilda Carper has been with us most of these last forty years. She organizes schedules, creates work lists, and makes things beautiful with music and flowers. Julius keeps getting new ideas and organizes how we will do them. Others like Bob, Char, and Denise have made it a very durable team. I see lots of advantages in living this way. I think the Lord has been good to us, and the people who have stayed with us for the long haul have made it possible. This is God’s grace because community and household are very fragile, yet we’re all together. Spiritually we make a home for one another.” ☺

› **For the Price of One** *cont from p.5*

Satan. Because he threatened their national program of preserving the Jewish nation by exclusion of sinners and hostility to enemies, he had to be killed. And yet, God raised him from the dead, vindicating his faithfulness.

Discipleship in a time of patriotism
What does faithfulness to Jesus call for in a time of hyped-up patriotism, fervent civil religion, and preparation for war?

Certainly, for disciples of Jesus who seek first the kingdom of God, there is also a proper love of country. Jeremiah tells the exiles in Babylon to “Seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you, and pray to the Lord on its behalf, for in its welfare you will find your welfare.” (Jeremiah 29:7) As disciples of Jesus, exile is our condition on this earth, since our primary identity is in the people of God scattered over many lands. And yet, paradoxically, this identity in God beyond the nations allows us to love our country better than those whose nation is their highest good.

This letter of Jeremiah is echoed by a similar word to believers under persecution in the letter to the Hebrews. “For here we have no lasting city, but we are looking for the city that is to come.” We are exiles whose homeland is heaven, and yet we are urged in the verses that follow to show our heavenly citizenship in most practical terms. “Do not neglect to do good and to share what you have, for such sacrifices are pleasing to God.” (Hebrews 13:14 & 16)

Precisely because we are not of this

world we are able to seek this world’s good in a way that people whose horizon is only this world cannot do. The nation in which we live does not define what is good. Rather, we discern this good among the exile community that listens to God.

Jesus’ fidelity to his people was expressed in a kingdom of good news to “all people,” the original reason why God called into being a “chosen people.” And when this offer was rejected, Jesus submitted to the Jewish leaders’ judgment. In a paradoxical way, Jesus could say, “My country, right or wrong, my country.” He did not agree with their wrong, but he suffered the wrong of his people as an offering to God. We must love our country, not because of its virtues nor by being blind to its vices, but because of the incarnation.

But we cannot love our country rightly if our spiritual center and primary identity is America. How do we know when patriotism becomes idolatry, when the spirit of the nation vaunts itself into the place that belongs to God? Idolatry is not just false worship. It is dangerous, as Jesus foresaw, and leads to destruction.

Most churches in America find it possible to offer praise and worship to God while making an idol of the nation at the same time. Here are some examples of how this works.

We make an idol of America when we:
—Claim that 3,000 deaths have “forever changed the world,” while millions of violent deaths in Palestine, the Sudan, Columbia, the Congo, and other poorer countries



Anne Gavitt

Camp meeting conversations.

Piche and Abram Hagstrom (Dave’s son) sand the faces of bleachers. Esther, with earplugs and a facemask, is working the cords for April Dilts, a Billings native, who runs the floor sander slowly up and down the gym. In the midst of this work, James approaches Anne-Marie with a bloody thumb. Forgetting to unplug his belt sander, he had started to change the paper and hit the trigger. The play transitions to Tim Otto, Aunt Joyce, Uncle Paul and me in the waiting room of St. Vincent’s Emergency Care Clinic. We tell thumb-smashing stories and try to cheer James up, who is holding up bravely. Between the waiting room and James emerging from getting six stitches, Uncle Paul tells me that this week has helped shift their view of community, due partly to thinking through theology, and partly due to our inclusion of James. Probably mostly due to James.

The final scene would be, in some ways, a misfit scene. Like it was in real life. Walking in on Monday morning expecting to finish only a few more bleachers, and finding that all of the dry racks had fallen during the weekend. The boards are marked up, Daniel and I (the main crew bosses) have already left to return to San Francisco. The day starts out bleak, with the realization that the bleacher boards, which were perfect on Friday, will be put back on the bleachers with the dings and scratches made from falling during the weekend. The gym floor won’t get finished, but it will get mostly finished and then it will be time to leave. Tired and with a trace of disappointment, the work continues through the day. As the curtain drops, the audience is left with a sense of completion not in the work, but in the project itself. It won’t be until later that the audience realizes that they didn’t ever hear complaints about the work, that while it seemed mundane at the time, the news media really had it right—it was noteworthy that a group would travel at their own expense to fix someone else’s gym. And that in many ways it was a kingdom endeavor; a brilliant way to spend time serving others with brothers and sisters, with giving up of wants, and discovering joy in the sacrifice which, in the end, didn’t feel sacrificial at all. ☺



For the Price of One Editorial You Get

...A Shalomish camp meeting,
...Discipleship in a time of patriotism,
...Heaven or hell,
...and a beatific vision of basketball.

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

A Shalomish camp meeting Jesus’ longing, “Oh that today you might learn the things that make for peace,” was the theme of our Shalom Mission Communities camp meeting at Plow Creek Fellowship, August 8 to 11. Even though we have much to learn about peace, God’s gift of shalom

was over all—as real as the trees around us, the grass under bare feet, the tent overhead, the hands we held while blessing our food, the children’s noisy play, the old stories told to new friends, workshops and teachings, the youth still high on their work camp experience, crazy skits, and light in each others eyes.

We shared what we have been learning about peace in workshops like “Community for Introverts,” “Praying for World Crises,” “Teaching Children Conflict Resolution Skills,” “Inviting Jesus to Touch our Past Hurts,” “Sharing Poetry,” “Christian Peacemaker Teams,” “Building Community with Sudanese Refugees,” and “The Experiences of Youth in Community.”

I especially appreciated Jack Bernard’s talk (included in this newsletter) on Jesus’ way of peace in the gospel of Matthew, a remarkable tour through the inner logic of peace in Jesus’ life and ministry. Peace, Jack demonstrates, is not a gospel optional, it is the core of what Jesus has done by dying for us while we were enemies. Jesus fought the Messianic battle, but not against the Romans or against the unclean people outside the Law, as the leaders of his day expected. He was non-violent against people and violent against Satan pillaging his strongholds. Jesus came with power to heal, teach, to gather an oppressed but hope-filled people. He forced the authorities of his day to choose—was this manifest power from God or from

› **For the Price of One** *cont on p.12*



Circling up for prayer before the meal at the SMC Camp Meeting.

Conrad Yoder

Church News

News from Tiskilwa

Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

We were blessed hosting the SMC camp meeting and grateful for the people who came. Even the weather was great. The Sunday temperatures reminded us of last year's conference. God is faithful in providing for us and bringing us together!

Jon Foss was baptized August 25, and Erin Kindy on September 1. Praise God for

calling these two into his Kingdom. Jon left for Colgate University in New York on August 27. Erin will participate in CPT in Colombia for three months, leaving on September 14, Lord willing. Pray for them both. It is a new adventure to start college. There have been death threats against CPT in Colombia.

Meghan Reha is planning to leave for down under in New Zealand the first week of September. We wish her well. She has spent her summer on the east coast at camp and on weekends with her grandmother.

The Fellowship finances are very tight after paying the September property tax of \$14,000. We would very much appreciate your prayers. More Fellowship members are

caring for Donna at night. Steve Graham landed a high school math teaching job in Ohio, Illinois, a small school district north of Princeton. The Friesens are back working in ESL at DePue School, and Ruth Anne is also working with the pre-K parents on Fridays and one night per month.

Rich Foss is on his second two-month sabbatical—August and September. Rich and Sarah took a vacation on the east coast after dropping Jon off at school and returned September 10.

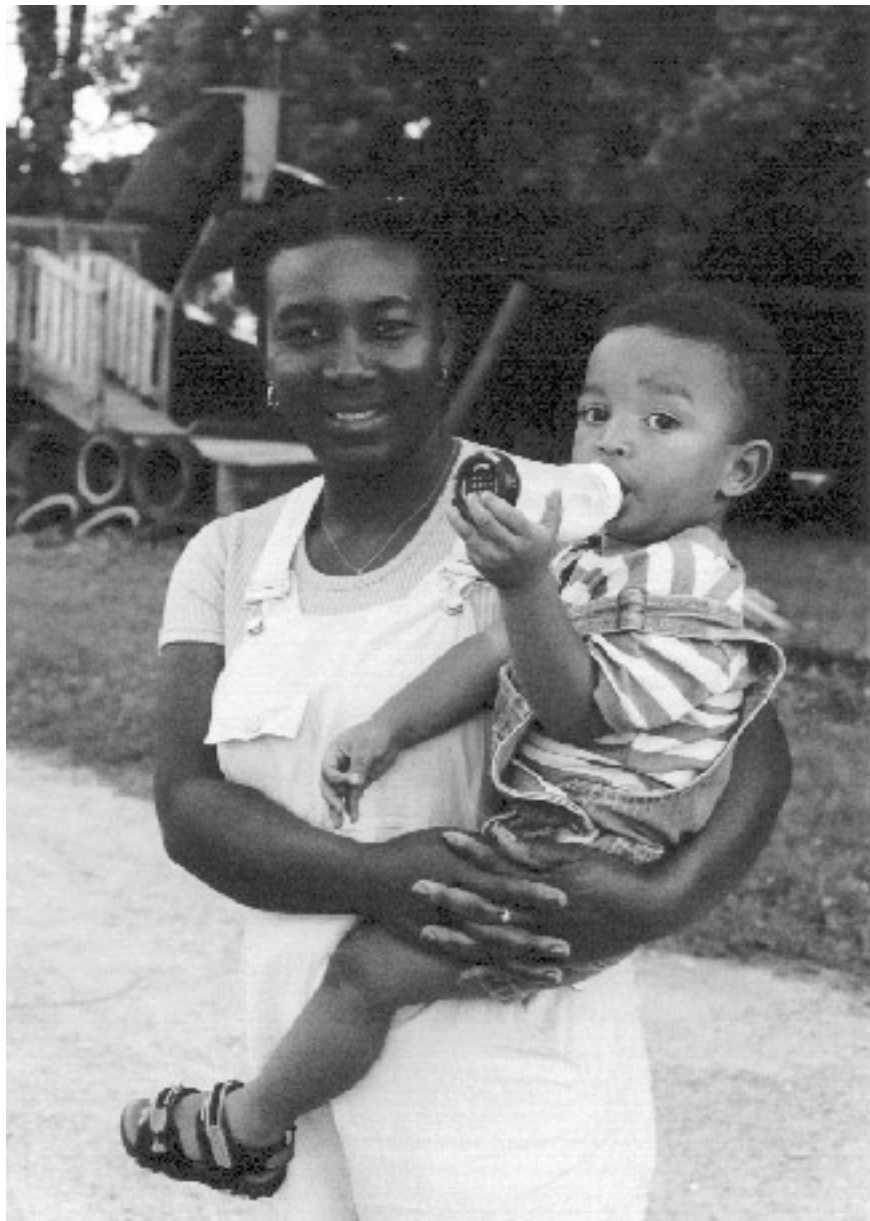
Many of us are excited about the freedom found in Theophostic prayer.

Lyn Fitz finished her psychiatric nursing job at Zeller Mental Health Center the end of July. Starting in September, she hopes to work in California as a travel nurse for 13 weeks, if such a job were to materialize.

The corner house insulation and siding job has been completed. We're glad to see the improvement and thankful for all the Plow Creek folks who contributed their time and energy!

Pete and Leonide Begly have bought a house in Tiskilwa near his older brother who recently moved his family west from Pennsylvania, and near his parents. They expect to move on Saturday, August 24. They are hoping to gain equity for a time in the future when they would buy property in Haiti.

Rick Reha is wondering whether a CPT assignment might happen this fall or winter, and Jim Fitz is willing to go to Colombia again this winter with CPT, if he can find the time in the midst of farm responsibilities. We'll see what the Lord has in store and how our finances would support these possibilities.



Leonide and Chris Begly

Anne Gavitt



Sunday school classes for our 20 children. For several years we have had three groups of children to lead on Sundays: babies, preschoolers and elementary school students. Beginning this fall, we will have five groups: babies, toddlers, primary students, middlers and youth. This means we are all being stretched and challenged as we meet the need of our youngsters' spiritual growth.

After a lean time of many folks traveling, we are now back full force and enjoying hearing about all that each other has experienced over the summer months. We were blessed by several weeks of teaching by Lauren Barron on Sabbath and are contemplating what that means for our lives. We are now studying Luke during the adult teachings.

This fall we hope, with God's guidance, to tackle several significant issues with different leadership groups helping the church in its process:

- Jubilee—follow-up on some concrete proposals made in our Jubilee and Sabbath teachings this year.
- Church review and vision—preparation for what we hope will be a major review of the church after the first of the year.
- Space issues—how we can better maintain our meeting house and how we can adapt to our growing numbers.
- Worship—how we can dispel the chaos and move towards a calmer, spiritual worship.

The Matias-Ryan and Dewey-Calderón families have participated in several membership classes.

In addition to Penny Mullet and her children, Carlos Hinojosa has been visiting Hope Fellowship for several weeks and even volunteered to teach Sunday School!

Several of the women of Hope Fellowship, led by Ría Snyder, have produced some beautiful tapestries and pillows to donate to the Mid-Texas Mennonite Relief Sale in November.

We have our second annual Women's Retreat on October 11-13, so we women are looking forward to that special time together.

Jim & Ría Snyder celebrated their 46th wedding anniversary in August.

The big excitement around here is that Brett Dewey and Esther Calderón are expecting their second daughter any day now. Big sister, Moira, has made the transition to her big-girl bed and awaits baby Audrey.

We look forward to news of your lives together and continue to keep you in our prayers. ©

» The Inner Logic cont from p.1

Israel's perception of itself was that it was still in exile. They still did not have a son of David on the throne as had been prophesied by Jeremiah, Isaiah, and Ezekiel. They were still under foreign rule, and dominated by pagan culture.

During the period about 160 years before Jesus was born, we find the Jews under Greek rule. Judas Maccabee and his sons rose up one afternoon and drove out the Greek oppressors. They also slaughtered the impious Jews who had given themselves over to Greek culture. This made a hero of Judas Maccabee (the purification of the temple after this revolt is the origin of Hanukkah) and formed the picture of what later generations would come to expect from the Messiah. What they did is very much what we see expressed in the current Islamic militancy, called *jihad*. They *purified* Israel by holy war. This purified state didn't last very long, but it was only natural that the people would expect the Messiah to come in a similar fashion, conquering their enemies and restoring Israel to its purified state.

My personal experience of heroic peacemaking consists of reading e-mails from Christian Peacemaker Team members.

Jesus fighting the messianic battle
When Jesus comes on the scene, he does fight a battle—but not the one that the Jews expected. The enemy was not Rome. The enemy was not those impious Jews. Jesus' battle was fought in very symbolic forms, and the enemy was Satan.

Jesus encounters Satan in the wilderness. He is tempted and tested by Satan. He is offered the kingdoms of the world—a successful *jihad*. And he fights Satan precisely by resisting the temptation to holy war. Satan's temptation was not to do evil—none of the things he suggested to Jesus were evil actions. The evil that Satan wanted to instigate was to tempt Jesus to bypass God, and accomplish things without him—implying that God is, somehow, incompetent or unequal to the tasks at hand. Jesus resisted this temptation, showing that his—Jesus'—kingdom was not about purifying Israel and setting Israel free as a political nation, but about

trusting God.

However, he did fight Satan in ways that showed real messianic power. Most directly he cast out demons. Sickness was widely understood to be Satan's domain. This is expressly stated when Jesus heals a man with a shriveled hand on the Sabbath. Delivering him from the power of Satan on the Sabbath became a great point of contention.

The messianic battle included restoring the outcasts. Rather than seeing the outcasts as needing to be expunged from God's people, Jesus was restoring these people in his battle against the power of evil. The Hebrew prophecies were about the Messiah gathering Israel. Jesus gathered twelve disciples, symbolically representing the twelve tribes of Israel.

But he was not setting Israel against the Gentiles. He was setting people free from the powers of evil, and this is extended to the Gentiles as well. This action goes back to Genesis as God's original intention for the children of Israel, to be a blessing to the world—not a select group of people defending themselves from the world.

Most importantly, Jesus was offering Israel a radically different view of who God is. Certainly the vision of God he pointed to could be found in the Hebrew scriptures. But the prevailing Jewish vision of God had become that of an angry God concerned with purity and carrying out his actions by violence. Jesus, instead, portrays God as the loving father of his people. We see this most notably in the story of the prodigal son, but it comes up in the other parables as well.

What God wants first of all is not violent zealousness or ritual purity. It is that his disciples be merciful like their heavenly father is merciful. Jesus admonishes the Pharisees to understand what God meant when he said "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." The second thing that God wants from Israel is that they trust in Jesus as the Father's representative.

Why would people want to kill such a fine chap, who is saying such nice things and calling the people back to their own scriptures? Contrary to the popular Christian understanding, Jesus did not get killed because he was claiming to be God, or some other theological abstraction. Even that was not such a big a deal. There was enough language in Scripture about "sons of God" that that in itself wasn't the problem.

Jesus was killed because of one very simple thing that stretched over his whole

» The Inner Logic cont on p.14

► **Church News** cont from p.7

metaphoric significance to Judy's determination to truly live the Christian life, as John preached it so passionately. On her most recent visit to the cemetery where John is buried she hung the medal she received for completing the marathon on the tree over his grave.

Judy left on September 1 for her missionary year in Taiwan teaching English at Christ College. Steven Braney accompanied her to help her get started, mostly with the trials of getting a computer set up in a foreign country. As we have received enthusiastic emails from both Judy and Steven, it appears he succeeded. You can write her at judy@churchofthesojourners.org.

We just finished doing one of our "Nature and Purpose of the Church" seminars. This one was for a group of students from Biola University. They spent several days with us learning about church as community. They came to us already interested in forming a community themselves. Some of them had tried living together with deeper intention than being just roommates. At the end of their time with us, some of them had decided to give forming a community a more serious go. We pray for their good intentions to bear fruit, and we hope to stay in touch with them to be a help and encouragement.

The next issue will undoubtedly give details of the birth of James and Laura Strzelec's baby, who is due to emerge October 16. The whole community has enjoyed watching Laura's belly grow.

Rick DiMicco, who has been with us for

about two years, was baptized in the crashing surf of the Pacific Ocean on September 29, causing many angels to sing and rejoice, along with our congregation.

Dale and Debbie Gish attended the "Kingdom Now" gathering in Columbus, Ohio on Sept. 27-28. It's billed as a gathering to "encourage and challenge ecclesial troublemakers" on the issue of the church's response to nationalism.

Kelly Zazvorka's 40th birthday was celebrated by all the women of the church dressing up as one of the characters in *I Love Lucy* and having a slumber party which included watching several Lucy episodes—including the famous Italian grape-stomping episode. Laura Strzelec laughed loudest. Kelly had the best Lucy setup.

Laura, Jeff, and Naomi Hare continue the process of adopting Leo "Chubby-Cheeks" Guerrero, age 1, into their family.

Lily Martinez grieves the death of her sister, Sonia, who died Sunday, September 15. Sonia has had ongoing serious health problems and Lily has been a faithful sister, visiting her frequently in the hospital. Please remember Lily and her family in your prayers.

We had a sendoff on September 10 for Hannah Zazvorka, Matt Creeger, Dan Piche, Abram Hagstrom, and April Dilts who left the next day for Mexico and Central America on a classic youthful adventure. Their grueling itinerary takes them as far as Panama, traveling by bus. We expect them to return sometime around Thanksgiving, brimming with stories of grace and exhaustion.

As a part of rethinking who we are as a church community, we have decided to

concentrate on being a people of prayer and hospitality. With regard to prayer, we intend to include the practice of praying with the Psalms several times per day, with some doing the full Office of the Hours. With regard to hospitality, we understand that broadly as welcoming who God brings. This vision is inspired in part by having a few of the local street people attending our gathered worship, and our becoming more aware of them as people rather than as people with addiction problems. We want to cultivate more of an openness to whoever God puts in our path.



News from Waco

Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Fellowship

After years of praying for youth (which resulted in the birth of several very young youth!), it appears that Hope Fellowship finally has the makings of a small youth group!

Gwendolyn Matias-Ryan, age 12, returned to Waco this Spring with her family. José Mullet (14) and his sister, Theresa (12) have been attending Hope Fellowship along with their mother, Penny, for much of the summer. Luz Rueda (11) has been part of our church since she was a small girl. These four, along with leader Analí Gatlin, will be meeting Wednesday afternoons before our fellowship meal and discipleship groups.

We recently had a meeting of all the adults to determine how we could provide

News from Evanston

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

We've had two big celebrations in recent months that cause us to recall and marvel at God's faithfulness over all the years of Reba's history.

On June 2 we commemorated Virgil and Joanne Vogt's more-than-thirty years of ministry at Reba Place Church with a potluck meal and time of worship. Many Reba "alumni" returned to tell stories of living in extended household with the Vogts in earlier years. Virgil's anointed leadership has supported Reba through most of the challenging transitions of Reba's history. After a six month search process, Ric Hudgens was unanimously affirmed as the new Reba Place Church lead pastor; he began his term on September 1.

Julius and Peggy Belser celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary with the Fellowship and guests on August 23. A slide show from their first twenty-five years together recalled their leadership in the interracial Church of Hope on Chicago's west side. This ministry attracted about a dozen raw volunteers who discovered their calling to intentional Christian community and later became durable core members at Reba and Plow Creek. We also praised God for the legacy of their children—Nevin Belser, Nina Frantz, Anne Brown, their spouses and their children, who have carried forward, with remarkable faithfulness, the adventuresome Belser witness to Jesus' love.

Tikva Frantz made her profession of faith through baptism in Lake Michigan on Sunday, September 1. Her sister, Hilda Ginny Frantz, spent an "awesome" second summer with friends in a community at Paonia, Colorado, and also went backpacking with the Living Water Community Church youth group through more mountains than they believed possible.

Reba interns added a lot of life to our summer. Brian Mosher and Thomas Diebold taught and played with neighborhood kids in the Reba summer camp led by Rob Bady. Carissa Kennel served as assistant youth pastor of Living Water Community Church and lived with the Selph family. The interns, along with David Hovde and David Janzen, had a retreat day in which they made breakfast in the rain, threw Frisbees in the rain, took a hike in the rain and saw three wet deer. Then they gave up and went home just

before the rain stopped, and the sun shone beautifully the rest of the day. "Oh ye of little faith."

Chris Evans and her son Carl were with us the month of August. Carl petitioned the court to live with his mother in Perkasio, Pennsylvania, rather than live with his father in New York City. We are all dancing the "happy dance" here. After talking at length with Carl about his experience of living with his father the last eighteen months, the judge awarded full custody to Chris. Carl has begun high school in Perkasio. We expect that criminal charges against Chris for fleeing the state with Carl eleven years ago will be dropped.

Other items from our life and times:

- Intern Brian Mosher moved downstairs at Cana House so that Sue and Rachel Flecke could move upstairs to bigger quarters. The real reason for this commotion, however, was so we could all have another moving day and eat more chocolate donuts.

- We recently had a five-inch rain that flooded Dorothy Konsterlie's third-floor apartment. No rowboats needed, just some roof repair.

- Finally, our news puzzler concerns the Reba women's softball team. Though they showed tremendous improvement, they failed to win any games. However, Anne, Barb, Sue and Char are quick to point out that they did not lose all their games, either. Go figure.

News from San Francisco

Jack Bernard and Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

The summer has gone by very fast since the last issue was published. In that period there has been little of what we could call "normal time" at Church of the Sojourners. Our annual "Summer Sojourn" has come and gone and we were greatly blessed by it. This is our program in which we invite people to live and serve with us, as interns, for six weeks to get a taste of life in church community. This year we had just two interns, both name Matt, and they were both wonderful. It was particularly nice, from an SMC perspective, that one of the Matts was Matt Reha from Plow Creek.

That youth trip to Montana, which was a future event in the last issue, came off even better than expected. It drew together people from Sojourners, Plow Creek, and Hope Fellowship as well as some people from outside the communities. There is a separate article in this issue giving more of the story.

The first half of August was break time for us. During break time all of our regular meetings are canceled and people are free to take vacations. I don't know that for Tim Otto, Tim Lockie and Anne-Marie Saxton, traveling with the youth to Montana and Illinois exactly constituted a vacation, but many of us did things that looked more vacation-like. Zoe Mullery went to Ireland with her family, and Jeff and Laura Hare and their kids went with Laura's family on a cruise to Alaska. That sounds more like vacation.

Recently, Judy Alexander read John's story, "Marathon Man," to us at the conclusion of our worship time. The story is a parable about really living the Christian life instead of just talking about it. In the story a man claims that running marathons is the most important thing in his life, but he never actually runs one. Instead he subscribes to marathoning magazines and goes to marathoning seminars. After much training and preparation, Judy entered herself in the San Francisco Marathon—entrant #1963—and walked the entire route, all 26.2 miles, accompanied by Conrad Yoder, with many other church members walking parts of it along the way with her. Her reading of the Marathon Man story after just having completed a marathon herself certainly lent a



Barbara Bridgewater

Girls from Hope Fellowship.

"Then maidens will dance and be glad..." Jeremiah 31:13

Getting Acquainted

Meet the Lockies

Tim Lockie
Church of the Sojourners

We are pretty boring folks, and apologize at the start of this for being the blurb in the newsletter that you'll feel guilty if you don't read, and bored if you do. It would be great if something wild and crazy (or even interesting) had happened to us worth reading, but it didn't. In fact Jenny and I tried to invent some so that we'd have something interesting to write about, but we're so boring that we couldn't even think of interesting lies ("remember when we almost saw a bear..." nothing interesting).

We finally realized that we could just be boring, it's worked so far, and it's free. So here we are. I fell madly in love with Jenny in the summer of 1996 during the six-week internship program that Sojourners has each summer. In short order she reciprocated, and we married two years later (seemed long at the time).

It wasn't an easy time being married with George, Jenny's five-year-old basset hound. Jenny had lived for three years with George before I showed up and the role of Step-Pet/Owner was a new one for both of us and took some getting used to. He was used to taking walks whenever he could talk Jenny into them (somewhere on the order of eleven per day) and sleeping on the bed with Jenny. The first days of our mixed household were fraught with challenging conversations.

"Grrr," George would say to me which, when translated, means "You're not my real owner."

"Grrr," I would respond which meant, "Grrr."

Eventually we found our equilibrium, which was some combination of George not sleeping on the bed while I was in it, and acting like he listened to me, while I started taking him for walks at his leisurely pace (leisurely like a glacier's pace).

Jenny and I got along swimmingly; we never said anything cross to each other and tried our hardest to out-serve each other, but the second week was harder. We lived in Montana, where I was born and raised, for



Tim Lockie

Jenny (left), Tim (right) and Alexina (held by Tim) Lockie, with proud grandmother Judy Alexander (center).

the first year of our marriage, before moving to Church of the Sojourners in 1999.

The transition to San Francisco was not as bad as I had expected, due to the support of Sojourners, and I enrolled in school while Jenny started teaching in a 1st grade Spanish-bilingual classroom. I meant to study counseling, but accidentally got a B.A. in Economics and a minor in Business Administration instead.

2001 was the hardest year of our lives, a rollercoaster of tragedy resulting from the death of John Alexander (Jenny's father, my mentor, and George's greatest fan) and the joy of discovering Jenny and I were pregnant. (Actually, as it turned out, only Jenny was pregnant.) Jenny's mother, Judy, accompanied us to Montana for the summer to stay with my family for six weeks, a time in which all of us struggled with anger and grief at the loss of John.

2002 finds us, Judy included, in much higher spirits. The hole John's absence left won't ever go away, but it was partially filled by the presence of our daughter, Alexina Noelle, born in February. She is healthy and beautiful and I'm finding out that babies are people too. George likes his sister and Jenny thinks that it's cute when they kiss. I don't.

With the arrival of Alexina and the completion of my degree, we look to the future with high hopes of me finding a job (well maybe not high, but hopes, or if not hopes then wild-eyed-desperation at least), as Jenny won't be returning to school. I hope to be working in operations or administration for

a non-profit within the month, which would be nice because that's when the money runs out. By way of closing maybe it would be appropriate to say that God has been faithful up to now with our lives and we have little reason to suspect that He will change in the future, so we feel even in the face of hardships such as the death of our friend and father John, that the gift of Alexina, our presence at Sojourners, and even job hunting are signs to our family and community that the Kingdom is indeed near.



Hospitality for the Long Haul

Peggy Belser, as told to David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

"When I was growing up I imagined living in a country parsonage, married to a

pastor of course, with a big dog and a side porch. It's taken a long time, but we have a dog and a porch. We're nowhere near a country parsonage."

Julius and Peggy Belser just celebrated their 50th wedding anniversary—more than thirty of those years living in a Reba Place Fellowship extended household called The Clearing at 722 Monroe in Evanston. How did Peggy arrive at this vocation for community, hospitality and faithfulness?

"My parents both gave themselves to a country church till I was fourteen. Then we began to attend the Elizabethtown, Pennsylvania Church of the Brethren so that I could be in a youth group. My father had a furniture store in town. My mom did his bookkeeping and kept house. We had lots of company—visiting ministers, foreign students, and friends. I treasured riding my pony with my dad on Sunday afternoons. I had to learn to drive a car so I could go to school activities. I was more excited to get a driver's license than to graduate from high school. I was the oldest; my sister, Helen, was four years younger and my brother, Harold, was twelve years younger.

About twenty-five years ago we tried to count up those who have lived with us for more than three months and it was over a hundred. Who knows how many we've lived with by now!

"Just after World War II, following my sophomore year at Elizabethtown College, I spent a year in Brethren Voluntary Service in a peace caravan. This was very formative for my convictions. Our team went to local congregations, leading a week of programs and discussions with the youth and other groups about the church's peace witness.

"I don't remember a time when Julius and I didn't know each other, since we were in the same church and schools. We dated four years. I taught a year after college, and then we got married. I liked Julius' wild ideas. He was creative and full of energy—he still is. It was important to me that he was a serious Christian.

"After Julius graduated from college

we came to Bethany seminary in Chicago. I tried to teach school, but failed at it. So I went to seminary, too, and eventually finished. During that time Nevin was an infant.

"After seminary we followed the example of the West Side Christian Parish and launched a storefront church called Church of Hope beneath our apartment on Peoria Street. Volunteers came to join us—Albert Steiner, David Gale, Conrad Wetzel, Hilda Carper, Allan Howe and Jeanne Castner—people who have been in community with us for many years since. We were trying to build a colony of Christians, black and white, living together in honesty and love. Except for our family and the volunteers, the neighborhood and our church was all black.

Nevin went to the public school along with his friends. I kept house and welcomed a fair number of people who came and went. My friends from before didn't come to see me on Peoria Street!

"I remember one Christmas when Julius got a donkey and some sheep from Elgin to make a Christmas parade. We set up a manger with the animals in the vacant lot next door. Hilda Carper had recorded the Christmas songs of her children's choir, and these songs were played at the manger. The children were so excited they would bring their mothers to see the animals and hear themselves sing.

"Eventually we burned out. Julius was

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Peggy and Julius Belser just married, fifty years ago.