

Shalom Connections

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Some of Ransom Clark's Favorite Things

Brian Mosher
Reba Place Fellowship

Over the past seven months I have been Ransom Clark's caretaker for three mornings a week, in order to give Ransom's mother some hours of rest to recover her health. I would not have chosen this task for myself, but it met a need. As it turned out, caring for Ransom has been a blessing for me and a chance to defy gravity for him—of which you will learn more later.

Ransom Keith Clark, at three and a half years old, is changing rapidly. Any analysis of his character is like hitting a moving target. Each person has gifts of God for community. One of Ransom's gifts seems to be hospitality—he plays well with other children and adults, even if they are strangers. His welcome is exuberant. Before a visitor is in the door, Ransom is likely to ask, "And who are you?"

Everyone who meets Ransom is struck by his loving and hopeful spirit. He willingly lets other adults borrow him (as does his mother) from time to time, especially Sister Maria Zeiman. Ransom loves to play hide and seek. He always hides in the same place, and if I don't find him right away he helps by calling out, "Here I am behind the couch!"



*It is to just such as these that
the kingdom of God belongs*

Ransom has been a blessing to me by being himself. His occasional times of willful resistance to my authority are parallel to my own childish behavior toward God. Though I'm not supposed to be God for him, things do go better if Ransom listens to me, and if I listen to God.

When we are in sync with each other, we love to "defy gravity." This means running down the sidewalk,

› *Some of Ransom Clark's* cont on p.13

Comrades in Discipleship

The Ekklesia Project

Allan Howe
Reba Place Fellowship

First there was The Anabaptist Network in Britain. Then the Anabaptist Association of Australia and New Zealand. Now comes The Ekklesia Project, a network of professors and pastors from colleges, seminaries and churches across the U.S. and Canada.

In the last few months several of us here at Reba have belatedly discovered a growing network of fellow Christians who are joined by their commitment to some of the radical Christian basics: “the claims of Christ” as ultimate over competing idolatries, the church as an alternative community (“our true dwelling place”), “accepting rather than imposing death” as the normal Christian position, and restoring the unity and solidarity of Christians across denominational lines.

Founded in Chicago in 1999 by a nation-wide group of Catholic and Protestant academics, clergy and pastoral workers, The Ekklesia Project has grown since to include hundreds of persons from a wide range of denominational backgrounds. Stanley Hauerwas of Duke Divinity School is the best known participant, but the Steering Committee and core leadership comes from a younger generation of theologians and writers active in university divinity



schools, churches, and the seminaries and institutions of their denominations—think universities like Notre Dame, Duke and Texas Christian, seminaries like Garrett-Evangelical, North Park, colleges like Calvin, Goshen, Anderson and Point Loma, and renewal publishers like Brazos and Wipf and Stock. The influence of John Howard Yoder is clearly in the background, but the small number of Mennonites signed on so far is notable for a renewal movement so Anabaptist at its core.

Recently Greg Clark, David Janzen and I took several leaders of the EP on a walking tour of the Reba “village.” As they absorbed the many different forms of common life and ministry clustered in this small corner of a big city, it was clear that these teachers of courses on church and society were eager to find examples of living Christian community. Apparently seminary students convinced by the vision presented in their classes frequently ask, “But where is it happening?”

I believe the Ekklesia Project is a very exciting development, something akin to the Confessing Church of Karl Barth, Dietrich Bonhoeffer and others in Nazi Germany. Several members of Reba Place Fellowship and Church of the Sojourners attended the third annual EP conference in Techny, Illinois this June. Christian Peacemaker Teams was among the presenters. Information about the EP is accessible on the web at <http://www.ekklesiaproject.org> or by emailing mail@ekklesiaproject.org. 

Classifieds

**Interested in an internship in organic agriculture?
Interested in work in developing countries?**

World Hunger Relief, Inc. is a Christian organization committed to the communication of the gospel of Christ and to the alleviation of hunger around the world. Our program provides:

- Training in intensive, natural, sustainable farming techniques for those who are hungry and whose work does not provide sustenance;
- Education in methods of conserving and sharing resources for those with an abundance; and
- On-site training and assistance in sustainable development in specific locations around the world.

Our internship involves one year of training and work on our farm north of Waco followed by an optional three-month experience in Ferrier, Haiti. There is no cost for the training; room & board are provided.

Contact: Dale Barron
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Shalom Connections

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Shalom Connections on the Web

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Conrad Yoder
Church of the Sojourners

Since *Shalom Connections* production has moved to Church of the Sojourners in San Francisco as of the Spring issue of 2000, the newsletter has moved fully into the digital age, now being produced completely in electronic form. This has made it easy for us to make it available to our readers quickly and cheaply over the world wide web. Church of the Sojourners has provided space on their web site (at least until Shalom Mission Communities gets their own web site) for a repository for past and current issues of the newsletter, available for download at any time.

The newsletter is available in a total of four formats on the website. There is a “1-up”

version, which is what one would normally expect—1 page per sheet of paper. There also is a “2-up” or “imposed” version, which has pages pre-arranged on sheets of paper so that when printed, the sheets form a booklet, like what you are now reading. And for both of these formats, there is a high-resolution and low-resolution version available, the low-res version being especially available for people with slower dialup internet connections. These formats are all detailed on the newsletter website.

Because it will now be available over the WWW, readers now have the option of subscribing to *Shalom Connections* electronically (which would mean receiving email announcements that the current issue is available for download), continuing to receive the print version, or both. If there is no response, readers will continue to receive the print version as they do now. If you do switch over to the electronic-only version, this will get the newsletter to you faster, as well as save paper and printing expenses.

To subscribe to the electronic-only or additional version, please email Conrad Yoder at cyoder@adobe.com with your preference. The web site where the newsletters and SMC member community information live is at <http://www.churchofthesojourners.org/smc/>. This download information will be sent with each email announcement. ©

Conflict and Grace

A Community Visit

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

I visited the community of Wooden Bridge for a couple of days and found that they are struggling through a season of unresolved conflict, even while God is offering them much grace. It is not mine to write about these issues until the community itself can agree on how to tell this story. For now, the community has chosen to back off from a series of unfruitful members' meetings and give time for the Holy Spirit to do something new, rather than press for unity and inflict new hurts. Our prayers for them are welcome.

Meanwhile, the children keep on playing together, some of the teens have begun praying for the community, and those who can gather to sing and worship as they are able on Sunday morning.

I got up early the first morning to pray for these six families: the Bristows, Richardsons, Nicholsons, Patchins, Cooks, and Whitemans. My sadness was contradicted by the setting of my prayers. As I sit in the Patchins' screen porch looking out over the

spring-green moraine hills, the rising sun casts long shadows of trees that walk across the meadow. Birds fly by, singing their praise in the morning—blazing cardinals, a flash of orange from an oriole, robins, grackles, chickadees, a bluejay, and more and more. Sheep with lowered heads graze among the spring flowers that hold their heads high in the dewy daybreak. The pristine air carries a whiff of clover and trampled grass. God's gracious beauty seems still to dawn on the just and the unjust.

I remember last evening. Despite the pain of community that feels the brokenness of some adult relationships, the Patchin household swirled with teenagers and children from several homes, converging for lemonade, party-mix, music, Scrabble, and then roamed on to another house. Christy, just home from college, loves to hang out with her 8th grade brother, and everyone in between. When I think of the cynical and alienated youth culture of our nation, and see these achingly wholesome young people that love to be together, I am moved again by God's grace.

Meanwhile, another slower-paced drama was unfolding in the living room. This story had its roots in the civil war of Sudan. Last summer the Patchins took an innocent family vacation to visit Jubilee Partners community in Comer, Georgia for a couple of days. At Jubilee they recognized the kinship they share as "community" folks. Right away they knew how to be useful, how to enter the flow of life on the soccer field, the refugee village, the worship and common tasks. At that time Jubilee was

host to a score of Sudanese refugees dubbed "The Lost Boys."

The parents, Craig and Tammy Patchin, were not prepared for the conversation that ensued on the long drive home. Micah, Kelsie, and Christy insisted and persisted with the conviction that the Patchin family just had to make a home for two of these young Sudanese refugees.

To shorten a long story, Michael Chier and Samuel Kuamy (both twenty-year-olds) are living with the Patchins. They have called Craig and Tammy "Dad" and "Mom" right from the start. Samuel and Michael arrived two months before the Patchins' house, still somewhat under construction, was ready for them. In the mean time, Mary Richardson said, "Sure, they can stay with me."

Two weeks ago Samuel and Michael received an astonishing phone call from an uncle who told them their mothers were alive in a refugee camp in Kenya, mothers they have not seen for fifteen years, and whose faces they can not even remember.

As the teens carried on in the kitchen, a Sudanese reunion was underway in the living area. Gabriel, a young Sudanese man who had been adopted out of a Kenyan refugee camp by a U.S. family eight years ago, happened to be in a college class with Tess Richardson in Madison. Soon he was hooked up with Samuel and Michael, and discovered they already knew each other.

The saga of these Sudanese "Lost Boys" began when they were about five years old, fleeing villages destroyed by Northern Sudan Muslim forces. Thousands of boys had escaped the village massacres because they were in the hills with cattle. Now they launched on a trek that would cover several years and thousands of miles before a remnant of survivors built a refugee camp for themselves in Kenya, where they languished since 1994.

Samuel and Michael's weekdays are strenuous. They work an eight-hour evening shift at a sausage-making plant, sleep a few



Mary Richardson - David Janzen's Home

David Janzen



hours, go to a technical school where they are filling in the gaps to complete their GED's. Then back to work

Their experience of incredible hardship and miraculous deliverance has given Michael and Samuel a solemn dignity and gratitude to God for life that only old people seem to acquire in the U.S. At the same time they are learning how to make a meal and clean up in an American kitchen, run a vacuum sweeper, dial up other "Lost Boys" around the U.S. and catch their latest news.

Two weeks ago Samuel and Michael received an astonishing phone call from an uncle who told them their mothers were alive in a refugee camp in Kenya, mothers they have not seen for fifteen years, and whose faces they can not even remember. Their fathers, they learned, and many other relatives were gone. This bitter-sweet news is shared in the solidarity of a new family and a new community that, in God's providence, has become their home.

As Michael and I talked later in the evening, tears filled his eyes. He checks the news from his homeland on the web every day. Villages continue to be bombed, more people are dying—two million gone by now. He has a home and safety, love, a family like he's not had for fifteen years, and he grieves for the conditions his mother must still live in. Like other refugees, he finds that now having arrived at a place of safety, the faces of those who died on the way haunt him. The dangers once escaped return in dreams. "Sometimes I feel so sad..." We prayed together. I promised to keep praying for him and for his people. Michael hopes to study international relations, like his friend Gabriel. Perhaps one day he can help make peace.

At the meat packing plant where they work, Michael and Samuel often listen to the enthusiasm of their co-workers for the war in Afghanistan. This also fills them with deep sadness and a sense of futility in conversation. How can they convey to others who have not experienced it, the devastation and

suffering of war? "Americans," they observed, "only see the deaths of Americans."

I could not help but reflect on the irony of a community that includes a family of adopted children from Ethiopia, is hosting refugees from the Sudan, and is struggling through its own conflicts. All the communities I know have had seasons of conflict. In this world there must be conflicts to bring different expectations, convictions and needs into the light.

There is no path to holiness that avoids our humanness. The members of Wooden Bridge are seeking to conduct their conflicts

in the way of Jesus, a different manner than the world where "solutions" to conflicts are often imposed. Here I witnessed persons seeking to know how to listen when they are hurting, what to confess, what to forgive, and what to learn.

Jesus looked out over Jerusalem weeping for our world and longing for us. "Oh that today you would learn the things that make for peace." We all are learners, always beginning again. In all times, and especially in times of conflict, we are privileged to live in trust that his faithful love, even to the cross, is what saves us. Ⓞ

Poetry

Jodi Thompson
Reba Place Fellowship

Farmers' Market: Plow Creek Style

"Meet at the Farm Stand at seven in the morning."
First stop: Seven-thirty,
The parking lot of True Value.
Unload the truck, rain or shine.
Set up the canopy and tables.
"Don't forget the hand-picked fruit and vegetables!"

Next stop: Eight o'clock,
The parking lot of Walmart.
"Back the trailer in." "Just right!"
Set up the canopies and tables.
"Don't forget the tablecloths!"

It's almost eight-thirty!
Next comes what makes the stand...
Musk Melons: Big or Small.
Sweet Corn: Full or Half Dozen
Tomatoes: Boxed or By Pound.
Raspberries: One or Two Pints.

"Here, try a sample of watermelon or muskmelon."
"Don't be shy. Have some more!"
"Save money when you buy two."
"Any more sweet corn?" "Only two ears?"
"Knew I should have come earlier."

Look at the time. Two o'clock!
Time to pack up after a long day.
"Don't forget to say 'Bye' to fellow market stands."
Looking forward to going home.
Praise God for a wonderful day!

This comes from last summer when Reba Intern, Jodi Thompson, was at Plow Creek. She wrote, "I did the Farmers' Market twice with Jim Fitz. I really enjoyed getting to know him and working with him." Ⓞ

Church News

News from Waco

Barbara Bridgewater
Hope Fellowship

Lots of us are traveling this summer, some to see other SMC folks. Dan Piche and the Bridgewater family will be up in San Francisco to feel the rumors of cool summers there. The Gatlins are heading south, way south, to study Spanish and spend some time in Valle Nuevo, and then returning to go west to Colorado for some camping. Ruth Boardman-Alexander is staying with her mom and children in West Virginia the first weeks of June while John stays home to work A LOT! JB Smith is heading for a Mexican holiday/work time June and July (he is not commenting on how much is work versus fun). Cristina and children are heading home to Mexico for the summer. The Matias-Ryan family will be going back to Ohio for awhile for family reunions.

Whew!



News from Tiskilwa

Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

The big news from Plow Creek involves graduations! We are grateful for the accomplishments of these graduates and for the good skills and gifts they have to pass on to others in service.

• In May Hannah Foss received her master's degree in Social Work from the University of Central Florida in Orlando. She is engaged to Donny Hackworth of Elkhart,



Jonathan Cavillo and Evan Alexander dedications at Hope Fellowship.

Indiana and plans a June 2003 wedding.

• Heidi Foss graduated from Goshen College with a bachelor's degree in nursing. She is working on the Family Care Unit at Goshen General Hospital. Heidi played volleyball for four years at Goshen and set the all-time record in blocking.

• Jon Foss graduated from Princeton High school where he was an honor roll student and excelled at basketball. He looks forward to studying at Colgate University in Hamilton, New York where he hopes to fulfill his longtime dream of playing Division I basketball.

• Meghan Reha also graduated from Princeton High School. She was one of the graduation speakers and received a couple of awards, too.

Strawberry ripening is slow this year. Memorial Day (our usual opening the last few years) has come and gone with only blossoms and green berries. We are still hoping for ripe berries for the Strawberry Festival on June 8th!

Rich Foss has had two months of sabbatical during April and May, during which time he rested and wrote half of the first draft of a book on leadership. He has expressed deep gratitude for the opportunity to take a sabbatical.

Some of us are involved in Theophostic prayer sessions that allow God's healing light to be operative in our lives.

The Friesens finished ESL aide jobs at DePue School the end of May and after a few days of transition are ready to jump into the strawberry fields! Richard's mother, Gen-

evieve, fell and broke her right leg above the knee. She was near death about a week later but seems to be recovering slowly.

Meg Foxvog's mother has pancreatic cancer; Boo Graham's father also has cancer. Both are on chemotherapy.

Helena Graham is looking forward to baptism at Camp MennoHaven on June 16. Jon Foss is also hoping to be baptized this summer. We are happy they are deciding to commit their lives to Jesus!

The Corner House is being insulated and sided in a major renovation project. We are grateful for the Lord's provision in all of the details.

Greg and Heather Clark and family are planning to spend mid-June through mid-August at Plow Creek as they escape city life in Evanston. We welcome them!

Erin Kindy is volunteering at Jubilee Partners in Georgia since her return from Colombia and through the summer. She has committed to full-time work with Christian Peacemaker Team for three years. During that time she has chosen to make Plow Creek her home base. We look forward to supporting her in her CPT adventures.



News from Evanston

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Remember To Not Forget Our intern class has been reading and reflecting on the Psalms in recent weeks. Some of the Psalms are historical—they “praise the Lord” by telling the story of Jahweh’s faithfulness through Abraham, Moses, the gift of the Promised Land, and protection from enemies. The Psalms are absolutely realistic in that they also tell of Israel’s disastrous unfaithfulness, the consequences of their injustice and lusting after other gods. Nevertheless, Jahweh keeps seeking them out, hears their cries for deliverance and repentance, and the story goes on. God keeps seeking and forming a people that will embody before the nations the steadfast love and justice of his own character. The fatal sin of the people was always to forget what God had done.

I wish I could write up our own story these past months with that kind of insight. Still, in telling our story as part of that larger story, we remember God’s goodness and who we are as forgiven people on the road to the Kingdom.

Barb Grimsley has been “on the road” in a most strenuous way. She is walking 10 to 20 miles a day in training for a fundraising



David Janzen

Carissa Kennel (front left) and Hannah Blackwood (next to Carissa) cut up vegetables.

Walk Against Breast Cancer that will travel from Kenosha to Chicago in three days. She keeps wearing out her walking shoes, but her body is becoming a more and more fit temple for the Holy Ghost.

Linus and Virginia Brown, well into their 80s, have downsized from a larger apartment at 737 Reba Place to a smaller apartment across the alley at 709 Sherman.

(Linus and Virginia’s move makes room for Anne Stewart and her mother, Lilly, to live next to a wheel chair lift.) Everyone arrived on the 25th of May to make a line and help the Browns move, Reba style. But there was nothing left to move! Linus had commanded bypassers all the previous week with little requests. “Could you help me move this desk?” “Would you help me put these boxes into the garden cart?” “Do you know how to plug in a computer?” Linus used to be an engineer, and were we ever engineered. Praise God for community!

Joanne Janzen has “moved” to Berlin, Germany, for a month to be with daughter Natasha and her family as they await the arrival of another Janzen grandchild. David has been well-pitied and sometimes invited to other tables lest he pine away to something less than 200 pounds.

Jodi Thompson has graduated from the intern program and continues to live with Vicky Caleb. Intern Brian Mosher plans to stay on through the summer, working in the Reba Church children’s summer camp along with Thomas Diebold (coming from Paris, France) under the camp director Robert Bady. Carissa Kennel, a ministerial intern at the Living Water Community Church has also joined the Reba intern group for the summer. Intern applications welcomed for the fall.

Reba Fellowship enjoyed a glorious Memorial Day at our lodge on Camp Lake



Andi Tauber

Virginia and Linas Brown relax at the Reba Memorial Day picnic at Camp Lake.

› **Church News** cont on p.8

in Wisconsin. A small group from Living Water Community Church (Earps, Taubers, Joneses, Nieta Jones and her mom, and Barbara Stern with Ben) already had warmed up the place with their weekend retreat, and joined the fun. This included a couple of hours of general repair, lawn mowing, and cleanup. Then on to hamburgers and some serious laying around. However, Orwin Youngquist—another engineer—managed to organize a line of folks on a rope to pull a dead tree out of the water so that it could look ugly on land rather than in the lake where we want to paddle our canoes. Ain't God good!

On June 2 Reba alumni came from far and wide to help celebrate Virgil and Joanne Vogt's more than thirty years of ministry at Reba. Virgil has resigned as senior pastor of Reba Place Church—although he will stay "in the saddle" until a successor has been appointed. After a great fellowship meal, many people spoke their tribute to Virgil and Joanne for their calm spirit in the midst of many crises, and for embodying a radical vision of the church as community faithful to Jesus. Though Virgil is resigning, he claims he is not retiring. After a time of sabbatical, we wait to see how God will deploy his gifts for apostolic ministry in Reba and in the wider church.



News from San Francisco

Jack Bernard
Church of the Sojourners

We are now into the second year following John Alexander's death and are probably just now beginning to get some perspective on who we are and how we are going to live. Church of the Sojourners is changing. On one hand, this is threatening—things are falling apart—and, on the other hand, it



Maureen Craighead

is an opportunity to reevaluate and refocus what we are doing with our lives.

Some concrete choices are being made. James and Laura Strzelec have decided to join the Catholic Church and move to the State of Washington. Luke and Sarah Mast have decided to move back to Indiana to be closer to family. Neither couple had become covenanted members of Church of the Sojourners, but they have been with us for years. Even though we support the decisions they are making, their departure, which is still some months away, will leave us with a sense of loss.

Another leaving of a very different kind: Marvin Trapnell and Jaime Zazvorka got married on May 18th. This felt like a real family wedding. Jaime, along with her family, has been part of us for years, but Marvin also lived with us for a couple of years. He came originally as a young man spending an exploratory year away from the Bruderhof and then stayed on beyond the expected time. We suspect Jaime may have had something to do with this. Marvin and Jaime are now living in Grass Valley where Marvin has been working at a Christian camp for troubled youth.

In addition, several of our other youth will probably be moving out to try their wings in the world in the not-too-distant future. Good though all this may be, these leavings mean we are shrinking, and for a small community that is unsettling. Concretely, this will mean that we probably can't afford to hang on to all the housing we have struggled so hard to get. Due to San Francisco rent control laws it is not easy to just rent out an apartment or two for a while and expect to get them back when we need them. When you put your life into small church community, you are putting all your eggs into one basket. If the basket starts to tip a bit, it is rather nervous-making. Tipping baskets are also an opportunity for growth in faith.

And it is not all leavings. In the last issue we reported that Dan, Kelly and Hannah

Zazvorka have been foster-parenting a one-year-old child named Leo. We anticipated that this was a temporary relationship we had with Leo and that he would eventually be reunited with his mother. It now appears that Leo will not be reunited with his mother but put up for adoption. Jeff and Laura Hare are beginning the process to adopt him, so there is good chance that Leo will become a part of Church of the Sojourners for an important part of his life and ours.

Other notable Sojo milestones—Tim Lockie just finished his college program with a degree in economics. By the time this is published, Zoe Mullery will have returned to us after an academic year away working on her first (of many I'm sure) novel. There is still a lot more to do on the novel, she says, but she has a serious start on it. Some notable writers who have seen the manuscript think it is promising.

Upcoming Things This summer from July 30th through August 6th some of our youth, along with youth from other SMC churches will be gathering in Billings, Montana for a week of service, worship, fellowship, and fun. They will be working along with a non-profit organization called Community Leadership Development Inc. to strip and refinish the bleachers and floor of a neighborhood school gym. They hope to be a testimony of Christ's love as we complete this project and serve the families of the south side of Billings. They also hope to serve and love each other as they work together and seek to grow in their relationships with one another. Please keep them in your prayers as they embark on this journey.

Judy Alexander is making preparations to teach in the English Department at Christ College in Taiwan for the coming academic year. This is taking place under the auspices of Presbyterian Church In America's Mission To The World and she is raising financial support for her time there. She plans to leave for Taiwan in mid-August. ☺

How Babies Make Peace

Or Seeing Conflict as a Ladder to Better Relationships— An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

I've been waiting for news from Germany that our daughter's pregnancy has come to full term and that a grandchild is born. In the meantime, I've been thinking about how absolutely needy and helpless an infant comes into the world. About all a newborn baby can do for herself is cry, and then it is the parents' wonderful job at all hours to discern what the cry is about. I vividly remember, when Natasha was born thirty-one years ago, how startlingly powerful were those instincts of love awakened in Joanne and me to care for this new gift of life. That is still true, which is why Joanne has flown to Berlin to be on hand at the time of this birth.

Another wonderful thing about a baby is that he is in no way ashamed to be needy. It takes us years of socialization to learn this perverse idea. Holding a baby not only cares for the baby's need, but heals something that is broken and needy within us.

In our American culture, we are taught to be strong and self-possessed, to deny that our existence depends on others. We inherit what Stanley Hauerwas calls "the self-deceptive project of being our own person." We are taught to resent and avoid those who remain needy, whose existence reminds us of our own humanity. Instead, we are urged to move as far "upward" into socially segregated ghettos as our resources and our denial will permit. And if we are less crass, we send charity and become trained at "caring for" the weak and needy while keeping our position of strength and professional distance. We are most threatened by those whose suffering is the kind for which we can do nothing.

Christian community is a place of formation for the alternative virtues of discipleship. We are called to re-learn what babies know, how to share our gifts and needs the

way Jesus demonstrated and taught his disciples to do. The passionate God revealed to us in the Old Testament, the Father who became visible in the humanity of Jesus, the One we Christians worship is not a God of self-sufficient power. We worship a God who can't help but love a contrite heart, who longs for relationships of spirit and truth, a God who needs a people.

Jesus wept over the city of Jerusalem because it did not seize the opportunity of his coming to learn the things that make for peace. He weeps today over our world that is rushing into the dark tunnel of a "war on terrorism," that justifies everything in order to prevent whatever "they" might do. At our Shalom Camp meeting August 8-11, we hope to reflect and share on what we have been learning about the things that make for peace. I want to begin that reflection early with a few observations.

Peace is not the absence of conflict, as the life of Jesus shows. But his is a non-lethal, ceaselessly creative, self-giving way to wage peace in the midst of conflict. Jesus' way of peacemaking does not take control of others or of the situation, and does not take on responsibility to make things come out right. It is willing to suffer rather than inflict suffering. This way of peacemaking is possible because it reflects the character of the Father whom he serves. Finally, Jesus' way of non-violent faithfulness is vindicated by God in the resurrection.

**Listening to a sister
or brother can be
a great adventure—
as large and exciting
as exploring another
country and culture.**

Pacifism, whose Latin root means "peacemaking," has the disadvantage, in English, of sounding like passivism. The Hebrew word *shalom* includes not just peace, but a peace-seeking way of conducting conflict. We have chosen the name Shalom Mission Communities to remind ourselves of the active, initiative-taking, insertion-of-life-into-the-realm-of-death demonstrated by Jesus.

Novelists have lamented how hard it is to write a good story about virtue and peace. Why do people gravitate to stories of conflict, violence, sex, and adventure? I think one reason is because such situations challenge us to exercise all the skills and pas-



Arabic symbol for peace

sions of our humanity. We need to redefine our understanding of peacemaking as a life of passionate commitment to the justice of reconciled relationships. One ministry of peacemakers in our day will be to keep exploring the ways of peace in such a way that all the energies of youth are called for and put into service. Plow Creek Fellowship, for example, has become a support base for persons taking the risks of membership in Christian Peacemaker teams. Our communities are base camps for an alternative consciousness, places from which we can sustain a kingdom witness in the world of consumerism and war. We also are privileged to invite interns and visitors into our communal lives, involving them in the sweat of serving others, the tears of honest sharing, and sometimes the risk of life and limb for Jesus' sake.

Welcoming Conflict Though we long for, and need, times of tranquility, and we wish we could show off a tranquil community for visitors, this is not the world we live in most of the time. But the way we conduct ourselves in the inevitable conflicts of community life—this is a critical witness to the world of what we mean by "peace." Over the years, Virgil Vogt has modeled for me how to welcome conflict in the Church community, responding to criticism with words like "Thank you for caring enough about me and the truth to say what you think." Conflict, dealt with well, can be like rungs on a ladder to better relationships. Our experiences of reality and our needs as humans will be different. Community struggle is a way to resolve those differences by making them assets rather than liabilities. Jesus has shown us the way to this kingdom of Love.

Listening with accurate empathy is a

► **How Babies Make Peace** cont on p.13

Urban Pioneers

Some Middle Class Families Moving Back into Impoverished Areas

Michelle Hillen
Waco (Texas) Tribune

Already in her young life, Hannah Bridgewater has witnessed the pain of poverty.

Once, while walking with her mom in their neighborhood, she met a woman down on her luck, who was walking the streets collecting cans to trade in for money. It was an early introduction for the five-year-old girl to the harsh realities of life—a lesson that most of her peers from middle class families wouldn't witness so soon. Or so close to home.

But Hannah's family, unlike many middle-income families, doesn't live in the suburbs. Instead, they are one of a slightly growing number moving back into the impoverished north side of Waco.

"We felt strongly that we wanted to move where the needy were, and not isolate ourselves and our children from them," said Barbara Bridgewater, Hannah's mother. "We feel pretty good about our children growing up here. We realize some of the violence and some of the things they will hear... it's not what I want to dwell on with them. But I also feel it is a plus. This is part of life."

Located at 18th Street and Morrow Avenue, their home is situated in one of the poorest parts of the city—the North Waco area encompassing much of the Sanger-Heights and Brook Oaks neighborhoods.

According to the most recent census figures from 1990, the average median family income of the three census tracts that cover most of the area was \$15,198 compared to \$24,058 in Waco and \$31,553 in Texas. The area also has a higher percentage of renters than the city and state as a whole, and a higher rate of certain kinds of crimes.

But what the census figures don't

reveal, say the Bridgewaters, is the sense of cultural, racial and economic diversity that can be found in North Waco. It is there that their children are learning Spanish from the neighborhood children, and there that they have convenient access to the amenities of downtown, like the library.

It's for those reasons, in addition to a strong spiritual draw to the community, that the Bridgewaters and others are starting to move back into the area.

The trend began in the late 1970's and early 1980's when renovators began to move into Sanger-Heights to rebuild the grand old homes that had fallen into ruin in the years after the "white flight" to the suburbs that followed World War II.

It is continuing now with an influx of "urban pioneers" like the Bridgewaters who are moving in and joining forces with the long-time residents who have struggled for years to turn the neighborhood around.

"These are people who are more adventurous," said Steve Bodzin, communications director for the Congress of New Urbanism, a San Francisco-based non-profit organization that studies urban design concepts. "They don't mind living in a risky area because they aren't worried about schools and not necessarily worried about crime."

Instead they move into the inner city for different reasons. For some, it's the chance to purchase a historical home for a bargain. For others, it's a chance to move closer to the city. Still others are motivated by religion, and a spiritual desire to initiate changes.

**"We felt strongly
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"The religious-based urban pioneers are more geared toward transforming an existing community rather than replacing part of it with people from somewhere else," said Larry Lyon, a sociology professor at Baylor University.

Jimmy Dorrell, executive director of Waco Mission and an organizer of a group that is developing a revitalization plan for the area, moved into a dilapidating house on Barron Avenue in 1977 with his wife.

"We did it out of the conviction that



Art: Bodzin

said Christianity has got to be incarnational if nothing else," he said. "For me to live in the suburbs and come down and quote "fix these people" was hypocritical... It was that whole sense of call that for us was the driving force."

For the Bridgewaters, one of the goals was to become part of a broader community in which families share resources and work together to build a better neighborhood. The idea is for families to get to know each other and look out for each other and each other's property, with one end result being less crime, said Barbara Bridgewater.

"One of the things our church believes is we need to stop living quite so independently from everybody, not just sharing house space, but sharing cars, sharing tools, and sharing help," she said. "Part of our vision for our lives is to share our lives and have them share theirs with us."

In addition to directly initiating change by interacting with neighbors, urban pioneers can also initiate change indirectly by helping the area develop a stronger power base, said Bodzin. "When you have enough people with money and education move into a low-income neighborhood, you can bring

some investment and some political attention to an area.”

Bridgewater said she experienced that recently in her neighborhood when she started a neighborhood petition for the city to install stop signs on Colonial Avenue.

“The city said they would study it and they did, and they put up stop signs,” she said. “Our theory is that a lot of folks around here don’t think they have any influence in terms of government... we can say not having stop signs is not OK. We need to do something about it.”

While many of the changes urban pioneers bring to a neighborhood can be good, there is a fear that if too many middle-income homeowners move into a low-income, predominantly rental neighborhood, it can cause gentrification, said Lyon.

Gentrification is a process by which the migration of middle and upper income families to a neighborhood drives up the cost for current residents and pushes them out.

Ultimately, it is up to non-profits and local government to ensure that quality affordable housing is available at the same time that property values go up, Lyon said.

While North Waco is far from gentrification, Dorrell said his community development corporation plans to ensure that development occurs according to the wishes of the surrounding neighborhoods.

The ultimate goal is an expansion of the community development that is happening in the Bridgewater’s and other neighborhoods. There, Dorrell said, a diverse population lives together and works through issues together, and there is room for everyone from Hannah Bridgewater to the woman who had to collect cans for money. ©

This article was excerpted by David Janzen from the Waco (Texas) Tribune, 10 March 2002. Barbara and Phil Bridgewater and their two children are members of Hope Fellowship.



HOPE

Valle Nuevo Reflections

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Every year since 1992 during the week of March 18, some folks from Reba and now from other communities as well head down to our sister community of Valle Nuevo, El Salvador, to continue growing in relationship with them and to accompany them in commemorating the crossing of the Lempa River as they fled into Honduras and became refugees on March 18, 1981, remembering those who died that day and giving thanks for those who survived. Six



Valle Nuevo Assembly

made the journey this year.

Gratitude for cinderblock On a material level, the most significant improvement I’ve seen in recent years is that about a third of the families have been able to construct permanent housing—that is, a cement block house on a concrete floor with a tile roof. Wherever you see such a house, it usually means that a family member is working illegally in the United States and sending money back, or else someone in the household was a combatant in the war and used their demobilization funds. But about two thirds of the families are still living in “temporary housing” — board walls with a

rusting tin roof built of materials salvaged from the Mesa Grande refugee camp where they lived in Honduras in the 1980’s.

Holding on to the roots There is little earning work in the local economy of corn, beans, and a little livestock that forages for its sustenance. Some families have relatives in the capital where they can work as security guards or put up with the wretched conditions of the maquiladores (free trade factories). Worst off are the many widows with children. The past decade has increased the disparity of wealth and poverty among the families of Valle Nuevo who all came from the refugee camps equally poor. Still, there is a measure of security and peace in a campesino village. These are the roots that city folks remember and return to for the holidays. Here you can grow some food

and not starve. This is where prodigal sons can return and find welcome. As we were there, one young man returned from the city streets and was dying of AIDS in the care of his family.

Generosity becomes walls With funds for materials donated by a member of last year’s delegation, Valle Nuevo chose the most needy widow, Santos, to get a new house. Volunteers dug a plot with pickaxes out of a hillside. From money our delegation saved by eating frugally, we gave \$175 to buy snacks for the volunteer workers who hope to construct this house in the weeks before

› Valle Nuevo cont on p.12

› Valle Nuevo cont from p.11

the rainy season begins. We are setting aside more substantial funds to pay for the legal costs of titling the farmland and the plots where people have their homes.

No more girls carrying water on their heads In the past year a water project organized by CARE has mobilized each household to dig ditches for pipes that bring running water from a spring four miles away. Now the families all have *pilas*—concrete tanks with a scrubboard for hand laundry. However, while we were there in the dry season, the water only ran for a few hours every five days, so a family hopes to fill their *pila* and make the water last. Though the quantity is disappointing, the system is a big health improvement. They now have almost no water-related illnesses. Us gringos could drink the (chlorinated) water and not get sick.

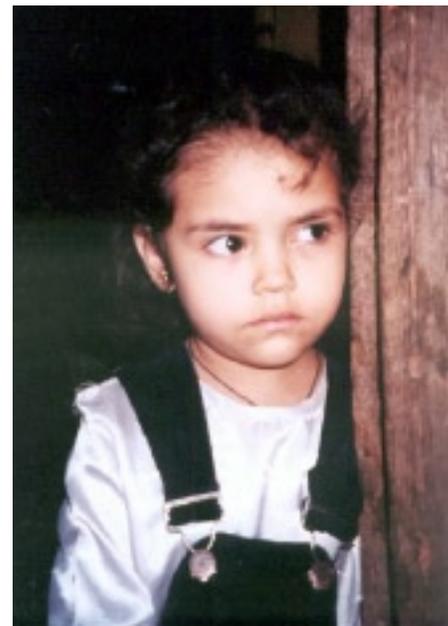
Another noticeable health improvement came through a project that helped each family build a composting latrine. When used properly (dump some ashes on the feces) these cement-block outhouses have no odor and no flies, and after three months of composting the waste can safely be put on a garden.

A success that has failed On one level the school at Santa Marta-Valle Nuevo is a tremendous success, but it also harbors the sting of bitter defeat. Thirty unpaid teachers teach 950 children in two shifts a day, doing other work half days to feed themselves. On

weekends for several years the teachers have traveled to university classes four hours away, hoping for teaching certificates and salaries. This past year eighteen teachers completed their university degrees—an immense achievement. Then the Ministry of Education decided to institute a teacher-qualifying exam. Nation-wide, only 30% of those who took the exam passed. In Santa Marta, eight of eighteen passed. Then the budget was announced: no teacher salaries at Santa Marta. Zero. This is Salvadoran politics in its most bitter form. The ARENA party doesn't expect any votes from Santa Marta, why should they fund the schools? The civil war against the campesinos continues in other forms.

Still, the teachers were grateful for the suitcases of school supplies and sports equipment we brought. J.B. brought several dozen Spanish children's books—about as many as the average family has in the States. But these books were the first of their kind that many teachers had seen, not to mention the 950 children.

Revival! The best news we heard in Valle Nuevo was what people had to say about their new priest, Padre Luis. He is responsible for a parish of about 30,000 souls. During the past year he said mass in Villa Victoria each Sunday morning and at Santa Marta-Valle Nuevo each Sunday afternoon. Previous priests came at most only once a month. They had sided with the right wing in the civil war, and refused to work with the lay pastoral leadership



A young girl from Vallue Nuevo.

elected by the people. They urged the people of Santa Marta to forget the sufferings of the war and the words of Romero, and return to the authority of the Mother Church.

In contrast to his predecessors, Padre Luis quotes Romero; he articulates the sufferings of the people in the war; he lauds their current struggles for justice, and repeatedly led them in chants saying, "A people who forgets their martyrs is not worthy of them." The people love him and fill the church, especially the young folks. Each weekend he sends several seminarians out to work with the youth who are coming to enthusiastic Saturday evening worship services. Ninety youth have been to a weeklong spiritual retreat to revive their relationship with God and their commitment to the community. The priest teaches about discipleship of Jesus. He has revived base Christian communities that study the Bible and discuss common concerns weekly in each neighborhood. The church is experiencing a revival.

On the 18th of March, we joined more than a thousand people that stretched out for a mile in a three-hour pilgrimage through fourteen neighborhoods. Each colonia on the via crucis had erected an arbor representing one of the stations of the cross. As we recalled Jesus' passion we also carried crosses naming those who had died in the repression that drove this people into exile on this day, twenty-one years ago. In Padre Luis' homily he spoke freely about the opposition he faces, getting called a "guerilla priest" because he serves the campesinos as diligently as he serves the others in his flock. I have to wonder if he will be allowed to



JB Smith attracts an audience in Valle Nuevo.

carry forward his mission. In a country as divided as El Salvador, I am praying that he can bring about a genuine reconciliation, turning the hearts of those with privilege toward the poor and to the Gospel.

My annual retreat For me a week in Valle Nuevo has become a sort of annual spiritual retreat. I find the pace and communal character of campesino life so healing to my spirit. That does not mean this life is a retreat for those who live it in daily work and struggle for survival. But when I'm here my ordinary worries are far removed, and I get to see things from a new perspective. The Spirit here is telling me that giving attention to the "life" around me is a way of communing with God. Back in Evanston I can start to believe that I really "have to do" all the things on my lists. Here I see that I should work at a pace that allows me to pray through the things I am doing, staying connected with God as I work. Poor people have to trust God for so many things they cannot control, which is why the Bible calls them rich in faith.

Two hammocks hang from porch posts ready for whoever is done in by fatigue or heat. I want to nominate for the Nobel Peace Prize whoever was the inventor of the hammock. It's too late. JB Smith tells us that Christopher Columbus' crew discovered the use of hammocks by an Indian tribe on the island of Costa Rica that was, of course, exterminated within a couple of generations.

I'm sitting here in the porch of Pastor and Rosa's house, scratching a very humble and willing skinny dog. A rooster crows. A chicken pecks in the dust. The parrots chatter and whistle in the trees. Rosa is washing corn in preparation for grinding and making tortillas. A simple-minded uncle walks around muttering to himself. With casual kindness, Rosa dips a pan in the pila and pours while he washes his hands in the falling water. The grandma of the house is reciting the rosary with others on the radio—her morning devotions. Jessica, eleven years old, is up now and washing her face. Then she takes the pan of corn off to the mill whose engine is put-putting in the distance. The world wakes up together in a campesino village, each fulfilling a task, not as individuals but as a living body. ©



› *How Babies Make Peace* cont from p. 9

communication skill and a spiritual discipline essential to peacemaking. The apostle James wrote, "Let everyone be quick to listen and slow to speak." We learn to listen by being listened to. "Give ear, O Lord, to my prayer; listen to the cry of my supplication." (Psalm 86) When we have really prayed our need into God's hands, we are no longer alone. God carries our burdens with us. In prayer we receive the resources to listen as we have been listened to. This is a spiritual discipline that prepares us for peace-making communication.

Listening to a sister or brother can be a great adventure—as large and exciting as exploring another country and culture. Listening with accurate empathy should be the first step in any Christian conflict. I want to listen to my sister-in-conflict until I can state her need and conviction in such a way that she acknowledges, "Yes, that is it. Now you understand me." Until we have done that, we usually carry projections or caricatures of the



other person in our heads, and we talk past each other, getting more upset and dangerous as we go.

Strange as it may sound, the first step of Christian conflict is to progress from misunderstanding to disagreement. However, I have often seen conflicts in community soon melt into hugs once persons feel they have been listened to with patience and respect. This allows the differences to be carried with love, and some suffering, until the day when God shows a way to resolve them. Finally, our peace is Jesus, who taught us that suffering because of love does not destroy us, but makes us one with him in an intimacy that heals all wounds, if not in this life, then in the next. And that is good news in a world preparing for war.

Oh, by the way, a message from Joanne on my answering machine declares that Noah Johannes Ulbricht was born a few minutes after midnight on June 5, a healthy parcel of gifts and needs. Thanks be to God! ©



Heather Clark

Ransom Clark

› *Some of Ransom Clark's* cont from p. 1

and then I lift him up by one arm so that he takes long strides in the air. We call this "Moon Gravity."

I tried to interview Ransom in order that you might get to know him better. Here are a few of his carefully-considered remarks:

What do you do with your brother Micah? "Play slay-the-dragon, big-bad-bug, and-drag-me-off-of-Micah's-bed."

"Tennis ball head with a sponge."

What do you play with your Dad? "Three robbers, sometimes moon man."

What are your favorite story books? "Noah's Ark, Three Robbers."

What can you do by yourself? "I climb my climbing wall up half way."

What is the password that opens doors? "Dinosaur juice, pig snout and moo cow."

What do you think of Anabaptist Theology? "Zebra."

What do you like about Christmas? "Santa, presents, a big jack-in-the-box."

What are your favorite colors? "Pink, red, orange."

What are your favorite numbers? "Two, five, four, one, six, . . ."

What is your favorite food? "Scrambled eggs."

Do you have dreams? "Sometimes I have a bad dream of the Boogie Man."

Is there anything you want to tell the readers of the Shalom Connections Newsletter? "Tennis ball head with a sponge." ©

Ransom Clark is the son of Greg and Heather Clark of Reba Place Fellowship.

A Camp Meeting Reminder

It's now less than one month until the Shalom Connections 2002 Camp Meeting at Plow Creek, August 8-11. "Oh that you would know the things that make for peace!" was Jesus' lament and longing when he looked over Jerusalem before his violent death. His words will be our Camp Meeting theme. In this time when our nation seeks God's blessing for war, we are pressed to know more profoundly what kind of God we serve in Jesus, and what is the way that leads to reconciliation. What are we learning about the things that make for peace in worship, in our families, with youth, in our neighborhoods, in Christian Peacemaker Teams, in our sister communities, and in the signs of our times? Come join us with your stories, your questions, and your experiences of peace in the midst of conflict on the way to peace.

As always, the camp meeting weekend at Plow Creek Farm will include ample time for conversation, play, worship and free time, surrounded by God's good creation. In about a month we will send out a brochure and registration forms. Contact Louise Stahnke at mstahnke@juno.com or at 19183 Plow Creek Rd., Tiskilwa IL 61368.

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