

Book Review

Grace Matters by Chris Rice

Tim Otto
Church of the Sojourners

There is no good thing that does not cost a dear price... Happiness is not a life without pain, but rather a life in which the pain is traded for a worthy price.

—Cristoforo in *Pastwatch*, by Orson Scott Card

Chris Rice tells the truth about the dear price of racial reconciliation, community, and friendship, in his new book *Grace Matters*. Chris relates his experience of trying to live the gospel as a white man with black brothers and sisters, in Jackson Mississippi. Early on in the story, he makes the choice to drop out of prestigious Middlebury College, in order to give himself completely to racial reconciliation and ministry with Voice of Calvary, a community development organi-

zation and church in Jackson.

Chris finds himself surprised and confused when he picks up traces of resentment and bitterness from the community to which he has given himself. A series of angry Voice of Calvary meetings takes place. In one meeting, a tough-looking young man named Spencer, stands and asks, "What I want to know is, what are all you white people doing here?"

In this strange, grace-full, kingdom adventure, Chris and Spencer eventually become best friends. Chris and Spencer's families move in together to help form the core of an integrated Christian community led by a black pastor. Readers who live communally will smile at the how well Chris captures the details of communal life. Yes, it is possible to disagree over whether ketchup should be kept refrigerated or warm! Chris revels in the communal goods: the moments in which hearts come together in a ferocious unity, the "throw-downs"—southern style barbecues—done with extravagant generosity, the beauty of different generations and races teaching each other dance steps at a New Year's party.

And also, Chris tells the truth about the pressure cooker he experienced. As he intro-

duces each ingredient (read the book and be amazed at all the good but cumulatively busy-making elements) the reader is both astonished at the rich mix of good ingredients, and not ultimately surprised that such a life does not nourish the people most involved. Chris makes a convincing case that such "unrealistic" gospel adventures are not automatically bound to fail, but rather that there was a missing ingredient—*grace*.

This is perhaps most evident in Chris' relationship with Spencer. While Chris relates Spencer's failures and sins, he is also astonishingly open and honest in baring his own green-with-envy heart. It is not the busyness that is most devastating (although being less busy would have helped) but it is Chris' rivalry towards Spencer, his competitiveness and grasping that rob joy, sleep, and contentment. It's Chris' failure to extend God's grace to his brother, and to experience God's grace himself, that makes life a misery.

As Chris introduces us to his world of brothers and sisters, it is hard to not root for these grasping-at-great-goodness humans, up to their necks in abundant grit and grime. He tells the truth about the pain,

› *Book Review* cont on p.15

CHURCH OF THE SOJOURNERS
866 POTRERO AVE
SAN FRANCISCO CA 94110-2841

ADDRESS SERVICE REQUESTED

NONPROFIT ORG
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
SAN FRANCISCO, CA
PERMIT NO. 693

Shalom Connections

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF SHALOM MISSION COMMUNITIES

VOLUME V

WINTER 2002

NUMBER 4

Bullet Holes and Dark-Eyed Daughters

Marcus Rempel
Grain of Wheat

Two brown-faced, black-haired girls, sitting on a bed, bullet-holes in the wall behind them, their beautiful dark eyes looking into the camera with a look of wariness beyond their years: this is the image that will not leave me after seeing pictures and hearing stories of Matt Schaaf's experiences in Barrancabermeja, Colombia as a CPT corps member. The bullets passed just above the girls' bed during yet another visit from Colombia's paramilitaries, state armed forces or guerillas (which group it was that night is hard for me to recall) coming to send a "message" to villagers suspected of collaborating with the other side. I can't imagine looking into the lovely dark eyes of Johanna and Sophia, my two blond-haired, fair-faced daughters after such a night.

As our church group watched slides and heard Schaaf's commentary in our darkened sanctuary one recent Friday evening, we came to learn that our connection to the violence in Colombia is not only as people who can identify



Many Children Dwell in My Father's House

Trujillo, Arica

with a Colombian family's desperately wanting to keep their daughters from harm. We are tied to that situation not only by emotion, but by economics. Our families in Winnipeg are participants in a global economic system that requires the terror of those two little girls in Barrancabermeja.

"The war in Colombia is not really the War on Drugs," Schaaf reports after one and a half years of active service in Colombia. "It's a war to open up investment opportunities." As CPT has witnessed and analyzed the conflict since establishing a presence in Colombia in 1999, it has come to perceive that the paramilitary and state armed

› *Bullet Holes* cont on p.15

Taken by Violence, Led to Joy

Rich Foss
Plow Creek Fellowship

In the summer of 1988 I wrote a series of disturbing poems about a man being gelded in prison. I was puzzled by the poems, sensing that they echoed a personal experience. I knew that I sometimes struggled with feeling like a real man but I thought that was probably normal for someone who become disabled with rheumatoid arthritis at age seventeen as I had. Maybe my psyche had interpreted becoming disabled as similar to being castrated. I didn't think so but I didn't know.

When you write a series of poems about a man who has been gelded you have a need to talk to someone and at the same time you don't want to touch the implications of such a taboo subject with a ten-foot pole.

About that same time I sensed the Lord telling me that my next retreat needed to be a guided retreat. Several months later two friends from Reba Place Fellowship, Virgil Vogt and Anne Stewart, agreed to guide me on a two-day retreat.

I didn't know what one was supposed to do on a guided retreat; it felt like a journey naked into the land of uncertainty. I spent most of the retreat in a semi-state of misery, meditating on scripture and writing, what seemed to me, to be a mishmash of things in my journal.

On the first morning I met with them I read the poems that had been haunting me

since the previous summer. I explained that although I had neither been in prison nor castrated, the poems rang painfully true to me. I shared a bit about the rest of my life and then they prayed for me.

The next morning I had scheduled an end-of-retreat meeting with my retreat guides. What was I going to say? During the retreat I recalled an event from my twenty-first year when I had to have total hip replacement surgery. The night before a young orderly showed up in my room and apologetically told me he needed to shave me. I expected him to shave my hip. Gradually as he worked I realized he was going to shave my entire groin. I lay helplessly as he worked me over with the razor, too ashamed to say or do anything but submit. I had only told Sarah, my wife, and a couple of close friends about this humiliating experience. The orderly had acted apologetic when he said he had to shave me so I know he wasn't trying to be malicious. He simply did not realize that, without explaining the extent of the procedure and giving me a choice, he was taking me by violence.

Eventually I began to reconstruct the scene and this time I imagined Jesus in the scene as well as the orderly.

Fifteen years later that story was the only thing I could think of telling my retreat guides in our meeting. As I began to tell them the story I started to sob. When I finally finished the story I sobbed out, "And when that happened I thought there wasn't a



FRITZ EWENBERG

thing that couldn't be taken from me."

They sat quietly with me as I cried what seemed like a river of tears. Finally Anne said, "I've known that you've struggled with feeling like a man and I wondered where that came from. When women are raped they often say, 'I don't feel like a woman.'"

She paused while I absorbed her words. Finally she said, "Richard, I think you are going to have to give that orderly permission to shave you." Her words, though strange on the surface, immediately made sense to me.

"Jesus taught us that we always have a choice," Virgil said. "When he said, 'If someone strikes you on the cheek, turn the other cheek' he knew that although we have no choice about being hit the first time we still have a choice. We can choose to turn the other cheek."

I went home from the retreat and began to write in my journal. At first I poured out my rage at having to lay there, submitting helplessly as it slowly dawned on me that he was going to totally shave me. Eventually I began to reconstruct the scene and this time I imagined Jesus in the scene as well as the orderly. Over several days I wrote out the scene and dialogued with Jesus each step of the way, choosing to allow the orderly to proceed. When I imagined the procedure complete, suddenly, to my surprise, I had a sense of Jesus wrapping me in a blanket like a newborn baby, telling me that he was giving me new life as a man. I felt this incredible surge of joy that lasted for a few weeks. @

› *Bullet Holes* cont from p.1

forces (who receive training, arms and funding through George Bush's "Plan Colombia") are trying to force out the guerillas (who do traffic cocaine as well as kidnap people to fund themselves) because they create an unstable investment climate by blowing up industrial targets like oil pipelines and hydro dams.

But CPT has seen that the role of soldiers in opening Colombia up for foreign investment does not end with fighting the guerillas. At least as important for Colombia's investment climate is their aggression towards civilians. This is especially true of the paramilitaries (technically illegal armed groups, for whom the government cannot be held accountable, although CPT frequently sees "paras" and state forces operating in close quarters). These groups harass, torture and kill Colombian farmers and fisherpeople until they decide to abandon their villages.

"You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder." (James 4:2)

This creates a twofold benefit for investors: First, land is freed up to be bought at low cost for the construction of oil refineries such as the one in Barrancabermeja or for the extraction of Colombia's other natural resources like gold and coffee. Second, a large, desperately poor, landless working class is created to provide an extremely cheap labour pool to work in the foreign-owned plantations, mines and factories. Should labour leaders arise to lobby for better wages, they are marked as "military objectives," and assassinated. This is the anatomy of Colombia's "attractive business climate" as dissected by CPT. Attractive, of course, as long as nobody asks too many questions about why they're getting such a good deal.

At first, I was incensed to learn that there are at least fifteen Canadian invest-

› *Book Review* cont from p.16

which helps us trust him as he describes the good. Best of all, starting with capillary hints, the book follows the pulse of grace until it lands in the very heart of the gospel. Chris' stories illustrate how relationships across barriers often carry a heavy price because of each person's sin. The price becomes a

ment companies turning a blind eye to this tyranny while profiting handsomely from it. My flash of self-righteous indignation at the "big bad business corporations" exploiting Colombia's economic formula of displacement and oppression did not last long. A sobering thought quickly replaced it: How often do Jenn and I ask ourselves why our family is getting a great deal on tropical fruit or gasoline? Often, an enticing bottom line is enough for us to waive our bias towards fairly traded or locally produced goods.

Increasingly, as our economy is structured around mass import and export rather than local diversity and economic self-sufficiency, our family and faith community in Winnipeg become the market for slave wage goods from Colombia or other "developing" countries. Schaaf points out that Canadians have "structured our lives in such a way that we depend on economies that kill and exploit, even if we don't know about it." The Apostle James describes our condition with candor: "You want something and do not have it; so you commit murder." (4:2)

Now that we know our complicity in the economics of war, what will we do? Today, I pray for mercy on my soul, ask God to grant me a grateful spirit while consuming less, courage as I keep seeking after shalom on earth, and joy in knowing that when Jenn, Johanna, Sophia and I ride our bikes, tend our vegetable garden, buy fair trade coffee or local produce, pursue reconciled relationships in Christian community, write letters to Colombian and Canadian politicians, or simply practice sharing, we are participating in the Reign of God, where the welfare of our girls and the daughters of Barrancabermeja are both tended to with the greatest of care. @

This past October, CPTer Matt Schaaf came home from Barrancabermeja, Colombia, to Winnipeg for a series of speaking engagements. Schaaf, a friend of Grain of Wheat, is one of two full-time CPTers whose home address is at 710 Aberdeen, a household owned and managed by Grain of Wheat in Winnipeg's economically depressed North End.

dear price, a precious price, if in the pain we also encounter grace and mercy. It is at those moments that we realize once again why we are Christians, and why the gospel is such good news. Hearing of how Chris and others were challenged to become bearers of grace and mercy to each other in hard and real and severe circumstances encourages us to imagine ways of also becoming bearers of

› *On Pilgrimage* cont from p.13

Most moving to me was the testimony of some white folks from Americus who had tried to run out or buy off Koinonia, who now honor Clarence's legacy and express their regret that, earlier, they did not have the "guts to do what was right." The irony of the story includes the fact that Habitat for Humanity, the offspring of Koinonia, is now one of the largest employers in Americus, Georgia, and the town's main claim to international fame.

Sanders Thornburgh, the "Koinonia theologian" has launched a Tuesday evening seminar on peace and justice issues, inviting outside speakers to lead the Koinonia community in study and reflection as it seeks to pursue God's calling in its current chapter of life. Sanders, and others I talked with, believe it is soon time for the core community of employees and resident volunteers to clarify their commitments to Koinonia and its vision. This may or may not become an intentional community with economic sharing. In any case, Koinonia is eager to build relationships with other communities and to strengthen such bonds of mutual support.

Community of Jesus' followers

As I return to Reba Place Fellowship and try to write up for the Shalom Mission Communities the significance of this Georgia trip, I realize with gratitude how important are our relationships in a God-given informal network of more-or-less intentional Christian communities. Each community is different in structure and mission, and yet what we share is a common calling that Richard Hays has expressed in words I want to borrow to conclude this story:

"The community of Jesus' followers is to be characterized by a strong sense of communal life; they are to forgive, to share their goods, to reach across ethnic and national boundaries and, of course, to live as a non-violent community. This vision can not be carried out by isolated individuals seeking to cultivate a private spirituality; instead all these practices are essentially relational."

God be praised for such a calling and for such relationships. @

Christ's grace and mercy.

Cristoforo's comment that happiness is a life traded for a worthy price comes at the end of his life. He has the advantage of hindsight perspective. Chris' book also benefits from hindsight. For anyone wondering if the price we pay for the good is indeed worth it, Chris' book is a from-the-fire, hot coal of encouragement. @

Contents

Book Review	16
Bullet Holes and Dark-Eyed Daughters	1
Church News	6
Getting Acquainted	8
On Pilgrimage	4
Poetry	3
Something Is Coming	11
Taken by Violence, Led to Joy	2

News from San Francisco

Anne-Marie Saxton
Church of the Sojourners

You have probably all heard by now the inconceivable news of Jack Bernard's death December 9th. In fact, this update to Sojourners' news is being written only a few hours after a beautiful and sorrowful memorial service for him, with people coming to share our grief from many facets of Jack's life, including brothers and sisters from SMC churches. Jack was diagnosed with stage four colon cancer on November 22, and died only seventeen days later, though the doctors had thought he had months and possibly years left, which has left many of us with the ache of not having said our farewells as we might have liked. However, Jack said his farewell to us in the sense that he told us immediately upon hearing his diagnosis that he was completely at peace and felt no fear or regret, felt in fact that he had lived a satisfying life worth being thankful for and that he was completely sure of God's care for him and for us. Edith, who has also been quite ill for some time with as-yet undiagnosed problems, traveled to Texas the day after Jack's diagnosis to visit her very ill mother, most likely to say her farewells to her. Joanna, their daughter, and her husband Jamie came in late November to stay for a while, a special treat since they normally live in Australia. It was God's grace that they got to be here for a couple of weeks before Jack's unexpected death, and that their son Paul was visiting last weekend, so that the whole family was with Jack at the hospital on the morning he died.

Of course, the church will be reeling from this event for some time—in fact we are still reeling from John's passing, only a year and a half ago. Why God would choose to take the two primary pastors of a tiny church in less than two years is a mystery that we can only solve by continuing to watch and pray and try and see with spiritual eyes what he is up to. Please keep Edith, Joanna, Paul, and our entire congregation in your prayers.

There are some things that take no effort at all to find God's goodness in them. A big happy example of that is that Margot Frances Strzelec was born on October 30th to her parents, Laura and James Strzelec.

There was great rejoicing at her arrival, after the last nine months of anticipation (especially the last two weeks, as she calmly stayed put past her due date). She weighed in at a healthy 9 lbs. 9 oz., 21 inches long. She and her parents are getting adjusted to their new lives and we are delighted to have Margot among us.

Kelly and Dan Zazvorka, who have been doing foster care for the last year, have two great girls living with them. Mika and Val are two and one half years old and eight months old and have been with the Zazs since October. Kelly and Dan are not sure how long they be with them but are enjoying their time together. We are praying that God will use the time these little ones have with us to plant a seed of love in them as they grow. The hope is that they will be reunified with their mother who is currently in rehab.

An update on the group traveling in Central America: they had a wonderful trip and were also very eager to be back in familiar land. They entered the United States before Thanksgiving, and were greeted by friendly familiar faces in Texas. We are glad to see their wonderful faces and hear about all their adventures.

Judy Alexander has gotten settled down in Taiwan where she is teaching English as a second language. She is having many adventures and enjoys her classes. She was able to make the trip home for Jack's memorial service and will be able to stay until Christmas.

The church has finished its year-long focus on Matthew and it has been a good study, affecting many in the congregation deeply—especially Jack, who led the study. He helped us look at the themes of rivalry, grasping, envy, and the fear of death and how they are at the root of who we are without Jesus. It was quite profound to see him put into practice how trusting in Jesus conquers the fear of death and disarms its power. Most of the church went to a lecture by James Alison, a theologian who has been a big influence on Jack this year, focusing on these issues and eloquently describing how Jesus' death and resurrection provides a way out. His talk impacted us all greatly.

We are thankful for the provision of God in having provided a job for Teri Creeger, Anne-Marie Saxton, and Tim Lockie. Teri is working as a speech therapist assistant, Anne-Marie is taking over Edith Bernard's bookkeeping job, and Tim Lockie is working as an administrative assistant with Innerchange, a Christian ministry serving the homeless in the Haight District of San

› Poetry cont from p.3

Heather Clark
Reba Place Fellowship

from the overflow

whether they read your diary or spanked you for screaming your rage or simply never came when you cried the tune sounded the same

no longer true you weighed your words hid your bluejeans in the mailbox your pain in your back and lost your taste for life

bless the blows which shatter your shell leaving you naked send you to hell (fall down! give in! crack up! break out!)

die, but doubt not God's arms hold in cold dark your sobs and groans shall rise together in a shout to shake old bones (in coffins and closets and churchpews)

then come forth clothed in Love's cataract new song thundering down drown the cries of your accusers who pale and quake and drop their stones



Francisco and the gangs in the Mission District (our neighborhood), and several other cities internationally. They are a great group of people and we are thankful to be a little more directly connected with them.

Shalom Connections

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

MANAGING EDITOR Zoe Mullery
EDITOR David Janzen
PUBLISHER Conrad Yoder
ASSEMBLY Edith Bernard
Lilian Martinez
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS Matthew Creeger
Chris Evans
Anne Gavitt
Various from *The Catholic Worker*

CONTRIBUTIONS/PERMISSIONS/REPRINTS:
Contact the Editorial Office, below.

SUBSCRIPTIONS/ADDRESS CHANGES:
Contact the Publishing Office, below.

EDITORIAL OFFICE	PUBLISHING OFFICE
726 Seward St #2	2818 22nd St
Evanston, IL 60202	San Francisco, CA 94110
(847) 475-8715 voice	(415) 824-1495 voice
(847) 328-8431 fax	(415) 824-8931 fax
dj-janzen@juno.com	cyoder@adobe.com

Shalom Mission Communities are:

Reba Place Fellowship
PO Box 6575
Evanston, IL 60204 <reba_place@juno.com>
(847) 328-6066 voice (847) 328-8431 fax

Plow Creek Fellowship
19183 Plow Crk Unit 2
Tiskilwa, IL 61368 <pcmc1@plowcreek.org>
(815) 646-6600 voice (815) 646-4672 fax
<http://www.plowcreek.org>

Hope Fellowship
1700 Morrow Ave
Waco, TX 76707 <hopecmty@flash.net>
(254) 754-5942 voice

Church of the Sojourners
866 Potrero Ave
San Francisco, CA 94110
<info@churchofthesojourners.org>
(415) 824-8931 voice & fax
<http://www.churchofthesojourners.org>

Poetry

Phillip Bridgewater
Hope Fellowship

Reflections on Matthew 11:12

Go, go and tell Johnny
Johnny B. good things are happening
When the greatest born of woman
Stirred the nest, made
Serpents shed their skins
A revelation of repentance
Fruits of forgiveness
Camel hair clothed
Locust fed
Milk and honey hopes
Restored in the river
Only to drown your cousin and
Raise him to the descending dove
And even as the
First became last
They would not stand
Words warning
Silence the voice of the wilderness
Swords drawn to divide and
Conquer a cause they know not what
As the messenger, much more the
Message shall be
Bound and gagged
Forced far from
Eager ears
Longing to hear the
Inevitable
Prepare the way of the Lord

John Donne, 1615

Batter my heart, three person'd God; for, you
As yet but knock, breathe, shine, and seek to mend;
That I may rise, and stand, o'erthrow me, and bend
Your force, to break, blow, burn and make me new.
I, like a usurped town, to another due,
Labour to admit you, but Oh, to no end,
Reason your viceroy in me, me should defend,
But is captived, and proves weak or untrue.
Yet dearly I love you, and would be loved fain,
But am betrothed unto your enemy:
Divorce me, untie, or break that knot again,
Take me to you, imprison me, for I
Except you enthrall me, never shall be free,
Nor ever chaste, except you ravish me.

On Pilgrimage

Listening to Communities Alive in Georgia

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

God wants this trip

In late October, Reba Place Fellowship had the opportunity to host twenty-three guests from Georgia who came to Chicago on the Jubilee Partners community bus to attend a national conference to end the death penalty. Ed and MaryRuth Weir organized this group out of their New Hope House ministry to families and friends of persons on death row in the Georgia state penitentiary. I considered the idea of returning on the bus to revisit friends at Jubilee Partners. And then I got an invitation to Koinonia Partners sixtieth anniversary celebration later in the same week. A trip to Georgia to visit several intentional Christian communities suddenly seemed arranged by God, and the results were better than the promise.

New Hope House: Griffin, GA

Heavenly communion on the bus

I enjoyed catching up on the news of Jubilee Partners friends, Robbie Buller, Will Winterfeld (who were driving the bus), and Al Lawler. At the second stop, Ed Weir made a call to a legal aid clinic for death row prisoners and learned that an inmate named Bill Putman had been issued a warrant for execution on November 13. For a busload of persons with family members on death row, this news fell as a heavy blow. Ed asked us all to stand in the bus aisle, to hold hands and pray. After we sat down, some of the women—mothers of sons who might one day get a similar death notice—began to sing mournful call-and-response songs, pouring out their grief to Jesus. Ancient rhythms and habits of faith, with roots in Africa and generations of slavery, pulled everyone together in deep emotion and worship.

Come by here my Lord, come by here...

We need justice Lord, come by here...

Our sons need you Lord, come by here...

The prayers went on, enveloping every-



David Janzen

After a seventeen-hour worship service and bus ride, twenty-three people huddle to show their unity in opposition to the death penalty.

one, even those who urged revenge.

President needs you Lord, come by here...

Victims need you Lord, come by here...

Then the singing turned to more contemporary songs:

Lean on me when you're not strong, I'll be your friend, I'll help you carry on... We all need somebody to lean on.

It was clear the friend they leaned on was Jesus. Mile after mile we sang, rolling from Illinois into Kentucky, weeping with the falling rain, a timeless prayer meeting through the night. And as we leaned into the rhythms and kept on singing, our spirits were lifted.

We are climbing Jacob's ladder,

Soldiers of the cross.

From deep lamentation the Spirit gave release and our spirits began to soar in jubilation and solidarity. Soon people were getting raucous and giddy with the joy of the Lord. "Halleluia" and "Thank you Jesus" echoed loudly in the acoustical confines of our bus.

Getting high on the Lord, one woman seized a baseball cap and announced, "Since we're having church, this is offering time." Up and down the aisle went our usher urging us "Dig deeper brother, it's for the building fund." People tossed in coins, M&M's, dollar bills, whatever. In a few minutes she jubilantly delivered the offering to "the Reverend" Ed Weir. "Here is thirty-two dollars so you can start planning next year's anti-death penalty conference trip." Cheers all around. After that folks went to sleep however they could.

Soaked in the Spirit

About 5:00 am we had a little excitement. At a truck stop the diesel-fuel nozzle

failed to turn off when the tank was full. As Robbie Buller pulled the hose free, a huge fountain of fuel spewed out of the tank, soaking Robbie and a nearby truck. No one was hurt. It took an hour to write an accident report and get Robbie cleaned up.

By 7:30 am we were at Jubilee Partners, stumbling out and saying goodbyes to folks with whom we had experienced heavenly communion on the bus. No one wanted to let go. For another half-hour we kept giving more hugs, taking pictures and lingering to savor the common spirit that had formed out of shared grief and worship that lasted half the night, soaked as we were with diesel fumes and the tangible presence of God.

Jubilee Partners: Comer, GA

Peacemaking in a time of slammed doors

What a privilege to spend a couple of days with deeply-committed long-time friends at Jubilee Partners. A decade ago Jubilee and Reba were linked in the Overground Railroad ministry, moving more than a thousand Central American refugees out of detention centers and refugee shelters in south Texas on to welcoming communities and asylum farther north.

The core ministry of Jubilee has always been their welcome center for refugees from around the world. For scores of refugees each year, their first home in the U.S. is Jubilee, where they are loved in community, taught English, and oriented to the life they will soon face on their own in America. But Jubilee has also been active in a world-wide

red clay of southern Georgia.

By the time we visited in 1975, Clarence had died, Millard Fuller had set up new businesses, and the first houses were under construction in Koinonia Village—a precursor to Habitat for Humanity International. I remember we shingled a house, poured out candy in the pecan plant, and went to a prayer meeting for community leader Ladon Sheets, who was, once again, going to prison for civil disobedience.

Over the years we lost touch with Koinonia. The people we knew had moved on. We were vaguely aware that the intentional community disbanded in the early 1990's and that ineffective leadership had almost run its businesses into the ground. However, the invitation to come celebrate Koinonia's sixtieth birthday promised an ambitious week-long series of events culminating in a day to honor Millard and Linda Fuller. I wondered, what is the nature of the community that seems to be thriving once again at Koinonia?

Joanne and I wanted our children to be exposed to this legendary community that had survived dynamite and drive-by shootings from southern racists.

I saw a big tent going up for Saturday's concluding festivities. The dinner bell rang and about forty people filed into the dining hall—Koinonia employees, volunteers, the board of overseers who had just arrived, and guests like me. We were about equal numbers of blacks and whites. Following the meal Foy Valentine, an eighty-some-year-old Baptist preacher from Texas, told of his experience as Koinonia's first volunteer, working alongside Clarence Jordan in the summer of 1944. "Clarence is the person most like Jesus I ever met." At the end of the summer Clarence paid him with a signed check in which the dollar amount was left blank—a keep-sake that Foy has treasured and never cashed.

After the meal Sanders Thornburgh filled me in on the decade of the '90's at Koinonia, a painful time of which no official history has yet been written. About a decade ago tensions grew between the white intentional community (which owned the assets



David Janzen

Norris Harris, Koinonia spiritual leader and chaplain, listens as partners and visitors discuss the future mission of the community in the Koinonia Museum.

in a common purse and exercised most of the leadership) and the mostly-black employees. Though blacks were welcome, the culture of the intentional community was such that few blacks considered joining. Everyone, resident partners and employees, agreed that a way needed to be found to share power more equally. Toward this end, the board of overseers moved to hire an African-American director who, it turns out, had not been formed by Koinonia values of simple living and servant leadership.

In pursuit of a more prosperous lifestyle for all, Koinonia plunged deeply into debt. One director was replaced by a second and a third. Mismanagement and embezzlement almost sank the ship. Not wanting to get into a power struggle with new leadership, and having other options, the intentional community dissolved and its members eventually all moved away. In order to pay off the debt that grew to a million dollars, forests were clear-cut for lumber, half the land was sold, and agonizing fund-raising letters were sent out by the board.

Evidently God did not want to see Koinonia die

At the right time, about six years ago, a group of experienced resident volunteers began to arrive providing leadership and new energy. The board became a more diverse and talented team who put out a huge effort over several years to get on top of the financial situation. And within the chaos, tested and trusted African-American leadership emerged in the person of Norris Harris, who was Coordinator of Operations

for a time, but now serves as the community chaplain. For the first time in a decade, Koinonia is debt-free. Leadership seems to be in trusted hands. Koinonia is once again a place where souls are embraced, where blacks and whites are working together in fruitful ministry, and where people really care about Jesus. Dreaming about the future seems possible again.

Saturday was a grand event under the tent with Koinonia alumni returning from far and near. The clown was in action, the coffee house was open, children and dogs roamed at will—the whole campus was alive. Millard and Linda Fuller spoke at length about their coming to Koinonia and discovering the purpose God had for their lives. Koinonia board member David Good proposed that Koinonia create a statue of a "Christian cow" with Clarence Jordan milking it from one side and Millard from the other, talking together about kingdom of God economics and the ideas that launched Habitat for Humanity. We agreed that that cow had heard Clarence Jordan preach on non-violence or it would not have tolerated such treatment.

Saturday evening we saw an almost-completed documentary produced by Faith Fuller (daughter of Millard and Linda) which will be called *Briars in the Cotton Patch*. This one-hour show, which Faith hopes to sell to PBS, is about Clarence Jordan and the early years of Koinonia Farm, when it was under attack for its interracial community life.

» On Pilgrimage cont on p.15

► **On Pilgrimage** cont from p.5

in the Atlanta wilderness like a transplanted John the Baptist. "Ladies and gentlemen, I beg you, pray for the business people in these skyscrapers, pray for the folks in the mayor's office, pray for the architects of exclusion, pray that their hearts and minds will be converted to a love of the poor and a commitment to justice for all. I urge you up there in your offices, come down and have a meal with the homeless people of Atlanta, your sisters and brothers. God wants to forgive you. Come down. Come down."

A night trying to sleep on the sidewalk has the effect of adjusting my bones and my theology. There are eight of us including Lynda, a veteran of the streets, who gives us tips on how to sit on cardboard to keep our bums from freezing. In Woodruff Park, across the street from the police station, we begin a reflection time from Psalm 23:

*You prepare a banquet for me,
where all my enemies can see me.
You welcome me as an honored guest
and fill my cup to the brim.
I know that your goodness and love will
be with me all my life;
and your house will be my home as long
as I live.*

Homeless for a night, we suddenly feel the presence of our enemies—scurrying rats in the park, temperatures plunging below forty degrees, and police stationed across the street, guardians of propriety and good

order for those with houses. Certainly, we had known a banquet all day long, but God's house seems rather large and drafty; and we wonder if "as long as I live" will last until morning.

Another homeless fellow named Mike asks if he can join us. Soon he is confessing to us his wretched life and addiction as if there had been an altar call. We pray together, assuring him of God's love and forgiveness. Then Mike warns us that the police will run us out of the park at 11:00 pm, but we'd be safer around the corner. As he promised, the police make us move. Around the corner, where they do not have to look at us, they leave us alone. The night is a fine misery of turning every which way to find a little comfort. One blanket and two jackets are not nearly enough. I end up stomping my feet to keep warm and talking with Ed, Allan, and whoever comes by in the last hours before the sun rises.

Day two of the festival is sunny and even more glorious than the first. Word has gotten around that a few of us privileged white folks passed the night on the streets and had been hassled by the police. I cannot believe how many people thank us warmly for this gesture that did nothing to warm their concrete beds. I am also surprised that scores of people who yesterday were strangers greet me with a sincere, "Hello, David Janzen, how did you sleep?"

A strange and wonderful exchange of status is going on—the homeless of Atlanta

are welcoming us into their community, and we are all healed in a mysterious way. It was only for a night, but we tasted it—the first were last and the last first, the way it will be in heaven.

**I began to understand
the crowds that
pressed around Jesus
and hung on his
every word—home-
less, emotionally
broken, disfigured,
booze-shattered,
prostitutes, scorned
by proper society—
they heard what he
said as good news
because it was from
God and for them.**

I'd made plans to catch a three-hour bus ride to Americus, Georgia, to join Koinonia Partners for the community's sixtieth birthday party. But Ed Loring insisted, "Save your bus fare and take our car." Then he gave another reason that caught my attention. "The way this country is going toward war, times will be hard on non-violent resistance communities. We will need to trust each other for more and more. Take the car." The car turned out to be a van, but got me there and back just the same.

Koinonia Partners: Americus, GA

Recalling Koinonia in the '70's

Twenty-seven years ago, when our family last visited Koinonia, it was a vibrant Christian intentional community with pecan groves, a farm, a pecan processing plant and bakery with a thriving mail order business. Joanne and I wanted our children to be exposed to this legendary community that had survived dynamite and drive-by shootings from southern racists. God had preserved Clarence Jordan's "demonstration plot of the Kingdom" where blacks and whites worked side by side and shared in daily table fellowship. Scores of volunteers had come through the place to be formed by Clarence Jordan's Sermon on the Mount teaching and by his "Cotton Patch Gospel" situated in the

peace witness, responding in direct ways to the conflicts and policies that create millions of refugees in our day.

The present Bush administration reduced the U.S. annual quota of refugees from eighty thousand to seventy thousand. But since September 11, 2001 the doors have been slammed on refugees so that only twenty-nine thousand have entered the U.S. in this past year. America's suffering has not translated into compassion for others beyond our borders. Many refugee service agencies have shut down. Jubilee Partners has had times in this year when their welcome center was empty.

As the flow of refugees has dwindled from time to time, Jubilee has poured their efforts into other dimensions of its peace witness. In May, half the community partners went to Jordan in a Habitat for Humanity project, mixing concrete by hand and setting blocks to enlarge the home of a poor Arab-speaking family. Their gesture of Christian solidarity to Muslims triggered an astounding welcome from all levels of Jordanian society, demonstrating a grass-roots longing for peace so frustrated by the powers of our world. Jubilee members have had many occasions this summer and fall to speak about their Jordan experience and their refugee ministry to churches and student groups hungry for some alternative vision to war and revenge.

A shalom checkup

Three years ago I was invited to listen to Jubilee members and help them struggle

through to more productive ways of making decisions together. Doctors do physical check-ups. My role, it seemed, was to conduct a shalom checkup—to listen for areas of unity and tension in the common life. This present round of listening confirmed that the community is living in the blessing of changes they made three years ago. What a joy to visit a community where sisters and brothers listen to the Lord and to each other—most of the time—and know the blessing of shalom!

In the changing circumstances of our country's drive toward imperial domination and war, the community is asking, what prophetic witness God would have them carry forward to show a better way. Their Jordan experience has the seeds, they believe, of an answer. May God guide them and us all.

The Open Door Community: Atlanta, GA:

A festival of shelters with the homeless

I caught a ride with Robbie and Al on their way to visit prisoners in the federal penitentiary in Atlanta. They dropped me off at the Open Door, a Presbyterian "Catholic Worker" community with the motto, "Providing hospitality to the homeless and to those in prison, through Christ's love." I arrived just in time to participate in their "Festival of Shelters," building on the

Jewish practice to move outdoors and live in booths in remembrance of the time when the children of Israel depended on God for survival in the wilderness. At the Open Door, this means living and sleeping on the streets with the homeless people of Atlanta.

**A night trying to
sleep on the sidewalk
has the effect of
adjusting my bones
and my theology.**

Soon we are in Woodruff Park, in the shadow of downtown Atlanta skyscrapers, setting up tables and hauling huge pots of soup in preparation for an utterly unique festival. An amazing collection of folks is gathering to offer this welcome to the homeless people of Atlanta. The Open Door Community includes a dozen men and women who have "graduated" from the streets by way of conversion to Jesus and his way of life, along with an equal number of downwardly mobile folks captivated by the promise that Jesus is present in the least of these. Other friends of the Open Door, short-term volunteers and guests like myself fill in the gaps.

After about two hundred homeless persons have eaten they are invited to help serve, to carry placards and to hand out leaflets explaining the festival. Students, police, mothers with children in strollers, and business men passing through the park are all invited to "Come, share a meal with us." Some take a leaflet, stop to talk and catch the spirit; others walk by with faces frozen in their determination to not see what they see. I began to understand the crowds that pressed around Jesus and hung on his every word—homeless, emotionally broken, disfigured, booze-shattered, prostitutes, scorned by proper society—they heard what he said as good news because it was from God and for them.

We carry signs around the park: "Housing is a human right," "Hospitality not hostility," "Millions on Prisons, Zero on Housing," "Public toilets with disability access for all," and on the other side it reads, "Pee for free with dignity." The policemen standing by also noted with "thumbs up" the placard that said, "A 21% raise for all Atlanta Police with no second jobs allowed."

God wants to forgive you

Ed Loring is street preaching, yelling

► **On Pilgrimage** cont on p.12



David Janzen

Evan, Ronald and Mike—members of the Open Door Community—take a break from serving lunch at the Festival of Shelters. Mike is still wrapped in his "pajamas" from our night on the streets.



David Janzen

Partners, volunteers and visitors pick up their food at a Jubilee Partners common meal. "No War in Iraq—Not in Our Name."

Church News

News from Waco

Jim Snyder and Ruth Boardman-Alexander
Hope Fellowship

We continue our Sunday teaching series on the Gospel of Luke, concentrating on Jesus' journey to Jerusalem and understanding the message to Hope Fellowship as part of His community on that journey.

Six of our members participated in the conference on Domestic Violence held at San Antonio September 13th and sponsored by Mennonite Central Committee and South Central Conference. Attendees: Ramona and Luis Matias-Ryan, Barbara Bridgewater, Maria Snyder, Cristina Dominguez and Norma Torres. Sharing what they learned, Luis, Maria, Cristina and Norma taught two Sunday classes on the theme of domestic violence.

The annual women's retreat held October 11-13 at Three Mountains Retreat considered the nature of social culture that makes up the church, with emphasis on Christ's role in breaking down dividing walls of separation and hostility, creating the new "humanity" (neither Jew nor Gentile) described in Ephesians 2:11-18. Attendees: Gabriela, Analí, and Nancy Gatlin, Barbara Bridgewater, Lauren Barron, Cristina Dominguez, Ruth Boardman-Alexander, Norma Torres, Ramona Matias-Ryan, Penny Mullet, Esther Calderon. The women taught one Sunday with a focus on taking on the new culture of Christ as the new humanity.

World Hunger Relief held its Farm Day on October 19th. Hope Fellowship members assisted in various ways—cleaning and preparing the farm beforehand, making and serving food, providing music during the day. It was a well-attended event and helped spread the news about World Hunger Relief's work.

John and Lisa Robinson moved into their new home at 2710 Colcord on October 26th with the much-appreciated help of friends and church members.

On October 28th women from the Gatesville Texas prison joined inner city women of Mission Waco's Women's group in a Habitat for Humanity house-build. Women from Hope Fellowship prepared the noon meal. In addition to doing much construction work, the women had a great



time talking about children and dreams. Barbara Bridgewater reported they had to teach many to use a tape measure as well as how to measure wood accurately.

Sunday school children are bringing pennies for the Penny Power project, which is part of the annual MCC Relief Sale and Auction held in Houston in November. Ria Snyder, Penny Mullet and several other women in the church created seventeen beautiful tapestries and table runners to donate to the Relief Sale.

Our weekly Sojourners discussions in the home of Phillip and Barbara Bridgewater have been great ways to reflect more on current peace and social justice issues, including the Middle East crisis, the current Iraqi threats, fundamentalism, and even violence among us. We have enjoyed Carlos Hinojosa's leadership in the meetings. Barbara expressed appreciation in being able to host the meetings.



News from Tiskilwa

Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

Plow Creek has welcomed a new family into the apartment above the Stahnkes. They are Jeff and Annie Moore with their three daughters, Miriam, Helen and Margaret. God has bountifully answered Dani Dean's prayer for more young children at Plow Creek. When the Deans moved here in 1997 and were looking forward to the birth of Aaron, she was shocked to discover that the youngest child here at that time was Andy Fitz at eleven years old. At present Plow Creek has ten children five years old or younger! Annie comes originally from Estonia and is keeping the Estonian language alive in the family by talking with the girls. Jeff enjoys playing the organ and piano.

Jim Fitz is phasing out of the farm work. He is hoping that he can hand over the work with the berries to Neil Horning and Gary Dean. Jim's real passion right now is working for peace. He would like to work for Christian Peacemaker Teams more full time. He has seen God at work in his audiences as he has taken speaking engagements to tell about his experiences in Colombia early this year.

Rich Foss is writing a book about Christian leaders and has consulted with Dave Jackson, a noted author and former

Something Is Coming

An Editorial on Matthew 12

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Advent promises, announces, heralds;
something is coming from God.

A beautiful baby is coming,
to a stable of beasts sanitary
on 100% linen stationery
for \$2.95 each plus shipping and handling.
But this is not Advent.

Christmas is coming,
a count-down of remaining shopping days,
a time to go into debt and depression
to make a generous impression.
But this is not Advent.

A new brand world is coming with
a narcotic for every pain,
a paint for every stain,
a new love to forget the old,
endless oil to keep out the cold.
But this is not Advent.

A holy war is coming
to set the mighty free
of terrorism by means of terror
on those who made the error
to not belong in our humanity.
But this is not Advent.

John the Baptist is coming in the Spirit's power,
denouncing, baptizing, announcing,
till asking, deep in Herod's tower,
is this the one on whom we're waiting?
Might this be our Advent?

Behold,
"The blind see,
the lame walk,
the deaf hear,
the dead live,
the poor hear good news."
Oh, may this be our Advent!

"From the days of John the Baptist until now
the kingdom of heaven has suffered violence,
and the violent take it by force."
Alas, this too is our Advent.

"The time is coming and is now here."
"Blessed are those who take no offense at Me."



› *Getting Acquainted* cont from p. 9

became Lego experts and accomplished athletes, especially enjoying soccer. We developed enduring relationships. (The Zazvorkas, also Sojourners members, were among those who lived with us.) That community died a slow but natural death. When Matt was beginning high school and Ian junior high, we needed to move on. We surprised ourselves by moving to San Francisco to hook up with Sojourners where we have found a body of people who truly love us and are committed to us. We are learning to return the favor.

Matt is now twenty-one and has continued developing his skills in guitar and art. He tends to be a meditative and thoughtful person who prefers to speak of important things only after cogitating. Like his father, he seems to have discovered whiskers. At last report, when they return from Central America Matt and Dan Piche are planning work in San Francisco for a few months to earn some money and then be roommates in some other state.

Ian, nineteen, is also a gifted musician, knows more than most people would ever want to know about computers and has facility in video making. Unlike his older brother, Ian does not need to meditate as long before he speaks his thoughts. He currently works at Jamba Juice (a California kind of place) and will be going to college next semester. He plans on moving away from Mom and Dad ASAP. He's addicted to his baseball cap and enjoys long walks on the beach.

Another honorary family member who must be mentioned is our house-son, Steven Braney. He is a lively twenty-one-year-old addition to our family. He recently wrote a bio for the newsletter, but you may not know that he is working day and night (practically), so that he can move to Guatemala as a missionary in January. We also can't forget Kevin Casey, who feels like family because he's here a lot. He even has his childhood picture on our famous photo wall. He's been friends with Matt and Ian since we've been here and has been on many Sojourner youth adventures including the trip to Montana of which he was an organizer.

The relationship that Sojourners has with SMC continues to be of great importance to us. All of our personal contacts with people in SMC have been delightfully positive. We hope that there will be many more opportunities for us to visit each other. Please remember that there is room here for you, if you ever want to come visit us in San Francisco. Mike will be happy to whip up a batch of pancakes for the occasion.

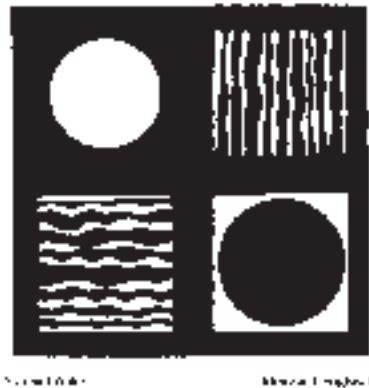
› **Church News** cont from p.7

spoke of how tired they were of marching against the stream of a culture that lives by opposing values. Mark asked us to ponder whether it was time for Grain of Wheat to considering acting more collectively to pursue voluntary simplicity. We don't know where such a reflective task might lead us, but many of us left the workshop with Mark feeling renewed energy and imagination for the work of art God is desiring to sculpt out of our community.

New Babies

Two more babies were recently born into our community. Sophia Jubilee Nast-Kolb was born to Jenn Nast-Kolb and Marcus Rempel on September 13th and Samuel Todd Russell Perrott was born to Joy (nee Estabrooks) and Jeremy Perrott a short while later on October 11th, although it felt like a LONG while later for Joy. Both children were delivered at home by midwives—Samuel because that was the plan and Sophia because she was in a hurry. Samuel's grandmother has already taken a picture of them together to be displayed at their wedding. We'll see. In the meanwhile we rejoice for the gift of new life into our midst. "Every time a baby is born, we know that God has not yet given up on the world."

- Rabindranath Tagore



News from Evanston and Rogers Park

Joanne Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

October brought us many fine celebrations. The first was the annual Big Birthday Bash at Cana House, celebrating three birthdays that fall within the same week for their small group members, Anne Gavitt, Susan Flecke, and Barb Grimsley—for whom this



David Janzen

Three "couples" sing "Let Me Call You Sweetheart," in remembrance of Linas and Virginia Brown coming dressed as each other to a Halloween party, at the Brown's sixtieth anniversary celebration.

was the fiftieth. The fifty balloons from that party are still up. Celebrating sixtieth birthdays about the same time were Vicki Caleb, whose two children traveled from long distance to see her, and Joanne Janzen, whose mother came up from Kansas for a visit.

October was also the month to rejoice over Linas and Virginia Brown's sixty years of faithfully loving and caring for each other. Most all of the family members came for their celebration, and then two weeks later, a host of the Browns' friends came together with Reba Fellowship and Church members to celebrate for another evening (see special article in this issue). This month *L'Hayim*, the Brown's small group, also welcomed Tim Johnson, a new member.

After thirty-some years as pastor of Reba Place Church, Virgil and Joan Vogt began their first-ever sabbatical. They are taking a break from Reba participation and have been making long trips to visit family and friends. Despite his sabbatical, Virgil serves this year as moderator for the Illinois Mennonite Conference. Says Vera Stoehr, "We really miss their presence with us, especially in small group."

Paul Rhode has been a gift of encouragement and love to the Clearing household and to other Reba families. Paul is a pilgrim residing with us for the winter, taking a break from walking around the country on a mission to demonstrate and to share about radical gospel simplicity, serving others for free and receiving whatever hospitality people are moved to offer.

We are grateful for the Lord's healing after some serious health threats and hospitalizations: Albert Steiner is again back at his job after back surgery; Vera Stoehr's heart is functioning well again (without missing

a beat of loving), Joanne Janzen is doing better on her new medication, and Allan Howe's abdominal surgery is healing well, but prayers for full and prompt recovery of his body are welcome.

On Sunday morning, October 27th, Orwin Youngquist and Sally Schreiner announced their engagement in the church Sally pastors, Living Water Community Church, and in Reba Place Church, Evanston. We rejoice with them in this "new thing" God has done and for all the processes of discernment and leading of the Lord that culminated in this announcement. That same weekend, members of both Reba Place and Living Water churches hosted twenty-three folks from Georgia who traveled up on a big bus to attend a national anti-death penalty conference in Chicago. About Cana House's eight guests, David Lukens affirmed, "They are wonderful people, and it was great fun!" (See David Janzen's article on New Hope House.)

A new chapter began in Tikva Frantz's life this fall as she became a student at North Park University in Chicago.

The Fellowship of Rogers Park found a unique way to celebrate Veterans' Day this year by connecting back with their heritage of warriors for our non-violent faith. This small group spent the day at the Menno Hof museum of early Anabaptist history in Shipshewana, Indiana.

Oh yes—we were also blessed by the large order of raspberries and butternut squash that arrived on September 30th from Plow Creek. We are exploring the feasibility with Plow Creek of getting weekly produce deliveries next summer as subscription partners in their farm.

› **Church News** cont on p.14

member of Reba Place Fellowship. Dave suggests that the book be deeply rooted in experience rather than theories.

Erin Kindy is still waiting and praying for a visa to return to Colombia with Christian Peacemaker Teams. After being unsuccessful two months ago, she reported on November 7th that she had reapplied with all the additional documents to fulfill the requirements for a churchworker visa. She is hoping for a positive answer from ten to thirty days after that date. Waiting these months has been hard.

Tanis Rafter, Helena Graham's fiancé, is moving to Plow Creek. They are planning to be married next summer.

Plans are moving ahead for Children's Church every other Sunday beginning in January. Carol Gale has been providing the vision and leadership to move it to reality.

The Horning family is hoping to visit Tutuk's family in Indonesia during December and January if it appears that the situation in that country will allow them to travel. They are now living in the Corner House (the northwest corner of the meadow).

Meg Foxvog's mother, who is living on the east coast, has terminal cancer and has recently decided to be on hospice care rather than pursue chemotherapy. Meg has been out to visit her.

A number of Plow Creek adults have participated in the Way of Christ retreats. These include the Deans, the Hornings, and, more recently, the Fosses, Tim and Carol Gale, and Jim Fitz.

The Plow Creek Bakery is off to a moderate start. One morning a week Boo and Louise are baking in the common kitchen and are selling breads wholesale to a local health food store as well as filling orders. They are needing time to get organized and are hoping to make a variety of breads, decorated cakes, cookies, and sweet rolls. Fudge brownies anyone? Or what is your order?



News from Winnipeg

Marcus Rempel
Grain of Wheat Church-Community

Trading Spaces

GoW's long-time rental arrangement with a neighbourhood church was terminated this year. A search committee was quickly struck to find alternative Sunday morning worship spaces. One strong priority for us was to stay in the neighbourhood. After scouring Wolseley all summer long, we ended up settling on St. Patrick & St. Jude's Anglican Church, a beautiful old building with lots



of
oak
stained
glass—but a
mile and a half away
from where most of us
live, definitely outside of
what we consider to be our
community's neighbourhood. We
all laughed when we learned that St.
Jude is the patron saint of hopeless cases
and lost causes. The sanctuary belongs to a
congregation that has folded, but cannot yet
sell it according to Anglican Church law, so
they were willing to make it available to us at
a very reasonable cost, rather than face a hike
in insurance rates for an unused building. It
does feel nice to have a place for which we
are the only occupants. Few of us miss the
ritual of stacking metal chairs and stowing
away songbooks that has defined the final
course of Grain of Wheat's liturgy for the
past twenty-one years. We're enjoying sing-
ing in a high-ceilinged space. We didn't know
how good we could sound. Until now, we've
always met in basements. As Paul Langel put
it, "We finally left the catacombs."

Much work and discernment is going into the question about what to do about worship space in the future. We all agree that worshipping outside of the neighbourhood we live in can only be a short-term option.

We are not likely to find a rental option that fits our numbers in Wolseley. Will we buy? Will we build? Will we meet in clusters in some of the larger houses? Will we move next door to St. P/J's? Only God knows. We appreciate any prayers you might send North for us to be tuned in to God's plan.

Voluntary Simplicity

Grain of Wheat spent the weekend of November 15-17 focussing on the theme of "Voluntary Simplicity," with Benedictine Oblate Mark Burch, a local writer and lecturer on this subject.

Rather than equating voluntary simplicity with frugality or material minimalism, Mark defines voluntary simplicity as "the deliberate organization of life

for a purpose." Using Michelangelo's process of sculpting marble as an example, he quoted the artist: "I look at the stone until I can see the piece of art that is wanting to escape. Then I chisel everything that stands between me and the work of art." Mark told us that there is a work of art within each of us. Voluntary simplicity means discovering that work of art and chiseling away everything that gets in the way of the expression of that artwork in the world. This is a co-creative process between ourselves and God.

In listening to our stories, Mark observed that many of us have been working individually for a long time to structure our lives deliberately around God's transformative purposes for us. We have tried to live into to the spiritual vision proclaimed in our covenant through our practice of spiritual disciplines, and in our choices about careers, housing, consumption habits, etc. Many of us feel like we are doing about as much as we can, and yet feel far away from that divine work of art waiting to be released in us. A number of participants at the workshop

› **Church News** cont on p.10

Getting Acquainted

The Secret

Vicki Caleb
Reba Place Fellowship

O Eternal God, we humbly beseech thee favourably to behold these thy servants now joined in wedlock according to thy holy ordinance; and grant that they, seeking first thy kingdom and thy righteousness, may obtain the manifold blessings of thy grace; through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

This prayer followed the exchange of vows and rings in the wedding of Virginia Christine Anderson and Linas Hutchins Brown, two Americans from the Midwest, on Friday, October 9, 1942, at St. Clement's Episcopal Church in Honolulu. The world was at war; bride and groom had each enlisted for service, he in the Navy, she an Army nurse. The previous March they had met after boarding a ship in San Francisco Bay loaded with military personnel, heading west. "A beautiful woman," "a good-looking man," both committed Christians. He pursued her romantically during the eight-day voyage and by two days after docking in Pearl Harbor, when he left on another ship for South Pacific, they were committed to marry each other.



Linas and Virginia Brown.

Sixty years, five children, many grand- and great-grandchildren later, with full careers in engineering and the Episcopal priesthood and homemaking and service behind them, on October 25, 2002, at Reba Place Church the couple and friends from all over celebrated the marriage and its testimony to God's goodness throughout their lives. Linas and Virginia: still seeking first the kingdom and its righteousness, still obtaining the manifold blessings of God's grace, and still bravely facing down the ravages of war in the lives of people. The sixtieth anniversary of marriage and, coincidentally, the twentieth anniversary of the arrival of Cambodian families to Reba Place Church and the first baptisms among them: Sovan Chom in June 1982; Sang Van Lach and Buey Neang in September, among others. Before the end of World War II, Linas and Virginia in a private moment at home had promised each other they would return to Asia as missionaries. That commitment was not fulfilled because entrance to the country was denied. Yet the hope was honored through a remarkable later mission in Evanston and Chicago to refugees from Cambodia, whose presence at the party blessed Linas above all as they joined the party "from all over the place (said Linas): Hanover Park, Mount Prospect, Skokie, Albany Park, Uptown."

"I was a stranger and you received me in your home. I was hungry and you fed me, thirsty and you gave me a drink," shared Charlotte Oda at the party, telling how she came in 1975 to the Brown household with

her two young children and received "refuge, safety, friendship," and—Jesus. "My life was completely changed for the good because of your faithfulness to Jesus."

"What is your secret?" people ask. The Browns' faithful love and reliance on Jesus are no secret. But Linas—often uniquely candid, and Virginia—unconditionally accepting, will surprise you. Asked The Question by a young husband in a group of men gathering for prayer at Reba Place, Linas answered, "Sexual intercourse is very important!" (That stopped the questions!) "Virginia has been a good mother, a good wife, a fine homemaker; she keeps our home very neat, orderly, and clean, she's an excellent cook and always receives guests with eager welcome." Virginia's artistry and love of beauty shows in her exquisite hand sewing, embroidery, and quilting. They find joy in simple things of life. Linas also says, "Virginia taught our children tolerance and longsuffering."

Towards the end of the party, Ric Hudgens, pastor of RPC, characterized The Secret by summing up many themes shared by others that evening. "Marianne Lembeck told us how Linas treats Virginia like a princess. Another appreciated the way Linas established and cared for the flowers around the meeting house, even in the dark alley in back. Nurturing..." Ric said, "the Browns' way of love is to nurture." Ric spoke of Linas' years of keeping up the Blue Book of the Church, recording every new membership and departure at RPC, birthdays, births, marriages, baptisms, deaths. Not content to simply keep the record, Linas, with Virginia's support, thought about each new person, got acquainted, figured out what they needed and how to assist them. "An amazing international collection of people have been blessed and cared for by the Browns," said Nevin Belser, "in an incredible ministry of hospitality and evangelism." The eloquent testimony of Sophorn Loeng on behalf of the Cambodians expressed their deep and lasting gratitude for Linas' devotion to them: being there when called, all hours of day and night, into any situation, trudging boxes of produce and baked goods up long stairways, waiting for hours at doctors' offices, hospitals, agencies, showing in many practical ways the love of Jesus.

And importantly, not doing so at the cost of neglecting his wife, in whose peaceful home much of this ministry also took place. Linas and Virginia each made sure the other was cared for. They dwelt in unity; "We always knew which way we were going,"

Linas said: the way of Christ.

A large, white three-ring binder bursting with handwritten cards and comments remains in the Brown home after the party. One says, "We join with other brothers and sisters in celebrating the favor of God which has been extended to you in such a unique way. We celebrate sixty years of marriage—in itself quite a miracle. But more than that, we celebrate the strong Christ-centered focus of your marriage. You bring and spread the 'aroma of Christ.' We have been blessed to share closely with you for many of those sixty years."



Meet the Creegers

Mike and Teri Creeger
Church of the Sojourners

And now, ladies and gentlemen, here they are, from their current engagement in San Francisco at Church of the Sojourners—it's the Creeger Clan! The four of us include Mike and Teri, parents of the brothers Matthew and Ian. We moved up to San Francisco in 1995 after living in San Diego for twenty years.

About Mike and Teri

We are both southern California natives. Teri was raised in a conservative Assembly of God church and Mike became a believer at nineteen, through a basketball team in an Assembly church. We've been married thirty-one years. We met at a Christian College where we were semi-hippies during the '70's Jesus movement in Orange County. A turning point in our lives was when we joined Lamb's Players, a touring Christian street theater company. It was there that we began to make a much stronger commitment to daily faith and to pull away from our materialistic culture. This was the first time we experienced anything like "community living." Since we toured together with a group of about twenty people for



Teri and Mike Creeger.

six months at a time, we had to learn how to work together and love and serve one another for the common good. Since that time we have never lost our desire to live in "community."

We surprised ourselves by moving to San Francisco to hook up with Sojourners where we have found a body of people who truly love us and are committed to us. We are learning to return the favor.

A second thing we learned was that the church is much bigger than our familiar denomination. As we toured the nation, we were housed in the gracious homes of Christians of every shade, and our appreciation grew for the diverse family of God. Now that we are members of Sojourners in San Francisco (possibly the most liberal city in the nation) we have come some distance from our Pentecostal roots, but not lost the essentials of our faith which are: 1) that we are made to love and serve our God and other people, and 2) that salvation is through and in Jesus.

Teri, after trying to make a career out of being a student ended up with a teach-

ing credential. She now is a Speech Therapy assistant working one-on-one with students. It seems that the demands of time and energy for teaching a classroom full of students was more than she, her family and church could take. She likes to paint and sing. She is into health foods and healthy alternatives like "Oxycise" (we do have to keep up our California image) but struggles with mortal enemies like Fritos! Teri and Mike each serve on worship teams at Sojourners. Mike helps out with various celebrations throughout the year such as Celebration of Yahweh's Kingship. He works one-on-one with students in Special Education for San Francisco Schools. He often uses his dramatic humor in unexpected and encouraging ways. On Halloween, he loves to dress up in his Court Jester costume and become an Old English Fool. And he's famous for his great pancakes!

The Creeger Family

Matt was born in our first year at Ronald Court in San Diego where we lived with five other like-minded Christian couples. By the time Ian came along our little community had more than doubled because of babies. (Hope Fellowship can relate to this.) It was a wonderfully nurturing time for children and parents alike. Our kids learned some things about living a simple life, serving others, caring for hurting people and having fun together in the kingdom. The nearby field with palms and crawdad creek became a place where they could explore, cavort and develop their imaginations. They also

» Getting Acquainted cont on p.11