

Shalom Connections

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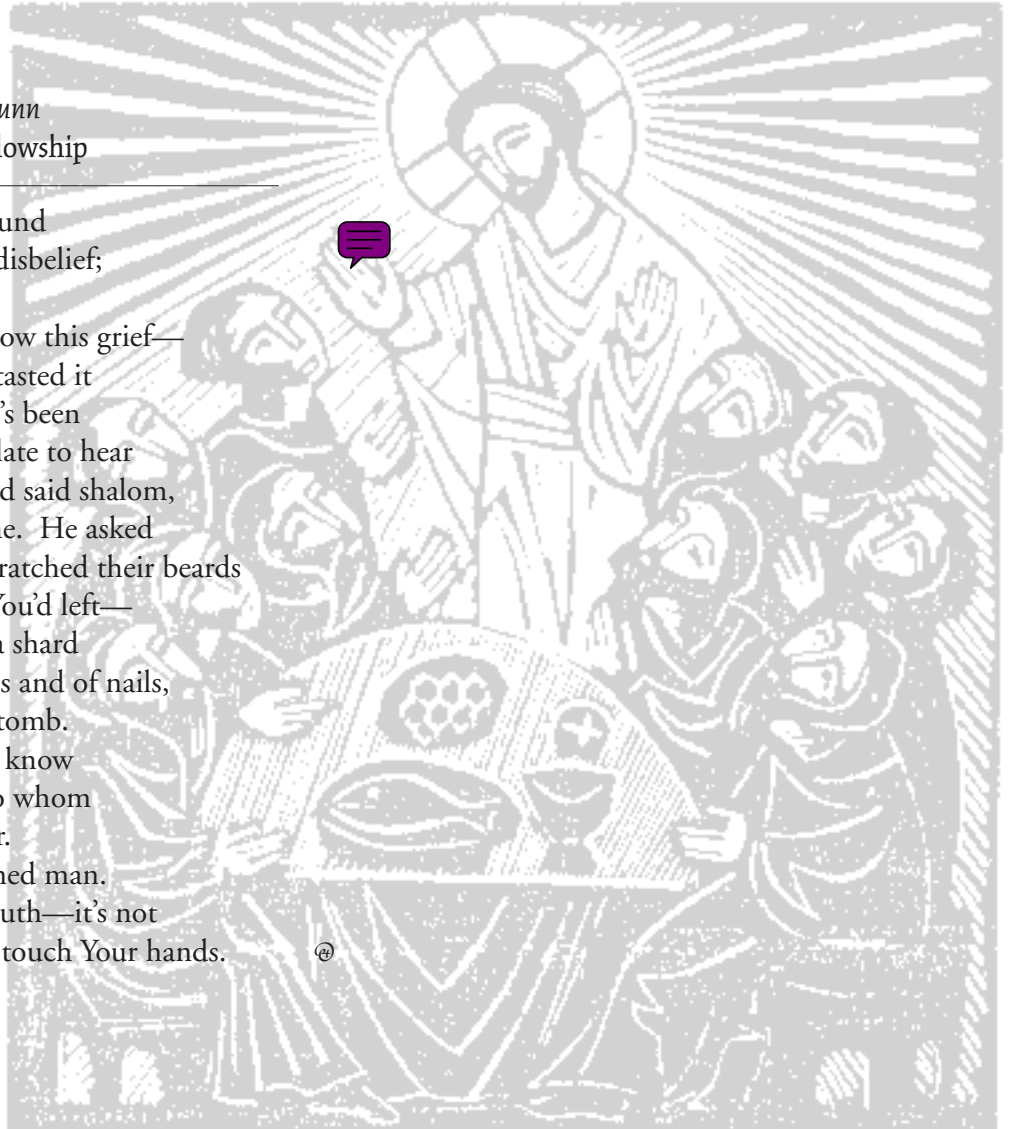
NUMBER 3

A Prayer for Thomas

Poetry

Heather Munn
Reba Place Fellowship

The emptiness his fingers curl around
Is more than absence, more than disbelief;
It is *not-You*, the utter negative,
The dark. You of all men must know this grief—
Now most of all—You who have tasted it
For the first time just days ago. It's been
A week now since he came home late to hear
Them say You'd come—alive—and said shalom,
And eaten fish with them and gone. He asked
If you had asked for him. They scratched their beards
And couldn't say. He ate the fish You'd left—
The broken flesh still clinging to a shard
Of bone—and thought of tendons and of nails,
And of the hollow blankness of a tomb.
Take pity on his hunger, You who know
The emptying—You, risen one, to whom
The hour in the dark is so familiar.
Have mercy on Your first abandoned man.
You know what he can't say, the truth—it's not
The proof he needs—just let him touch Your hands.



Not a Victory— A Deliverance, at Great Cost

Allan Howe and David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

She was a successful painter and art teacher who had chosen to live in a lush valley of Eastern Pennsylvania, surrounded by forested hills and the picturesque farms of Amish and Old Order Mennonites. Twelve years ago Chris Evans (not her name then) made an anguished decision to flee Pennsylvania with her four-year-old son Carl, to escape abuses he was suffering from her ex-husband, also Carl's father, who shared custody with her. These were abuses that the child protective services of Pennsylvania refused to acknowledge.

Miraculously, God used this miserable time in Chris' existence to awaken her longing for honest relationships in Christian community and to seek the God of her strange, yet somehow appealing, plain-clothed neighbors. Chris and Carl, traveling in disguise and under new identities, followed a network of Christian counsel that eventually led to Evanston where, for almost ten years, they joined fully in Reba Place Fellowship's life and covenant.

Two and a half years ago, just before Christmas, Chris was arrested in Elkhart, Indiana, and Carl's father's agents seized Carl during his school day there at Bethany Christian High School, where he was a freshman. Carl was put in the custody

of Bill Norton, his father, and made to undergo "de-programming" by the Rachel Foundation. This arrest and seizure also marked the beginning of a weekly Monday evening Reba prayer vigil for Chris, Carl, and for thousands of mothers who are similarly living underground without much legal protection or the support of Christian community. The court action against Chris dragged on month by month as one prosecuting attorney after another mysteriously dropped out of the case.

In August of 2002, the *Reader's Digest* came out with a glowing article (from the point of view of the father and the Rachel Foundation) about Bill Norton and his son being reunited. This article was published without the knowledge or consent of Carl or his attorney. For Carl, this was the last straw. When he described the recent ordeal of life for over a year with his father, the child custody judge assigned him immediately to live his mother, Chris. One result of Carl's time with his non-Christian father was a realization at the age of sixteen that he did want to live his life as a Christian among Christians.

Chris' trial was set for August 18, 2003. The lawyers were preparing her defense based on Pennsylvania law that allows a parent to flee with the child if the parent does indeed fear for the child's safety. In a pre-trial conference, the prosecuting attorney stated he had no case against Chris. He was convinced she did the right thing. But Judge Carol McGinley would not allow the charges to be dropped. Instead she declared Chris absolutely must stand trial on two felony counts with no witnesses allowed—with virtually no chance to make a defense and the possibility of fourteen years in prison. Elation at the attorney's declaration and dismay over the judge's power and determination (before any trial) to punish Chris! A few days later, the judge called another conference and the case was settled out of court.

"It's over." Chris Evans spoke these words by phone to John Thomson at Reba at noon on Wednesday, August 13. The judge had put great pressure on both sides to settle out of court. The result was an agreement, with the judge's approval, ending the criminal proceedings against Chris. No felony conviction. No imprisonment. No need for Carl to publicly testify against one of his parents. A great answer to many prayers!

"It's Jesus; it's not justice." Chris found herself depressed walking out of the courthouse. She felt like a soldier after battle. Carl felt the same way. In his view, this outcome



was Jesus—not justice—at work. Prayers had been answered. The main struggle is over, but there are still deep wounds in many directions.

"Not a victory, but a deliverance at great cost," is the way Chris described it. It has seemed to Chris that the authorities feared principled people willing to suffer for their convictions much more than they feared abusers of children. Chris agreed to a last-minute demand that she pay \$10,000 in "restitution" to Bill Norton for his loss of relationship with their son during the years Chris and Carl had lived underground.

"Don't ever look back," was the counsel of the African-American Christian who had handled Chris' additional payment of a \$1 fine for her "misdemeanor" and \$286 in court costs. From what he had seen of the Allentown courts, Chris should consider herself fortunate to have gotten out from under the system without far worse consequences.

The following Sunday, Chris and Carl drove to the old homestead in the woods where they had stayed twelve years ago, the first stopping place on their flight. They came to see it again and to say goodbye. They went to the Hawk Mountain area and stopped briefly to look at the house where people had stored Chris' paintings from that earlier era. They visited Carl's old nursery school.

"It's over..." but it's not completely over. Custody arrangements with Carl's father still remain to be formalized. We anticipate Carl moving to Evanston and enrolling this week in Evanston Township High School, as he desires. He will live with Allan and Jeanne Howe for a couple of months, until Chris can transition her art business from the east coast to the Chicago area.

Throw a party

Chris just phoned saying she is coming home and wants us to reserve the Reba Meeting House for this Saturday, August 30, so she can throw a party—an evening of story-telling, dancing, singing, and shouting Hallelujahs for all the answered prayers.

Chris said, "I never want to go through an ordeal like this again. But through it, God has saved my life, and I don't want to live without all the good that I have received from it." ④

Contents

A Prayer for Thomas.....	1
Not a Victory—A Deliverance, at Great Cost.....	2
A Father's Blessing	3
Mini Book Review	3
Getting to Know You	4
Briars in the Cottonpatch.....	5
Church News	6
A Strange Way to Welcome	9
Spiritual Battle at Pratt and Ashland..	10
Crazy Dreams.....	12
It Takes a Village (or Two)	
To Make a Wedding	14

Shalom Connections

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A Father's Blessing

Rich Foss
Plow Creek Fellowship

One morning, Hannah, when you were less than two years old, you woke up at 5:00 am on a beautiful summer morning. I took you on a long ride around Tiskilwa on my Amigo, my electric wheelchair. I saw things I never saw before, including a single, beautiful flower growing out of a tree trunk several feet above the ground.

That morning I blessed you, Hannah with my time, attention and a beautiful journey with your father.

Now I get to bless you again, Hannah, on your wedding day.

A couple of weeks ago, Donny, I had the honor of walking with you into an outdoor swimming pool on a semi-frigid day to baptize you. For several days before the baptism I had been checking the weather forecast and I knew it was going to be cold. Should I come up with an alternative plan? Maybe I could pour warm water on you in the Plow Creek meadow. That Sunday

morning you woke up and never expressed any doubts about getting baptized on a semi-frigid day. So I walked into the pool with you and blessed you by sharing a cold, wonderfully wet, exhilarating dunk with Jesus.

Now I get to bless you, Donny, on your wedding day...

Donny and Hannah, you each see the world differently. I must confess that when Hannah woke up at 5:00 all those years ago my first response was, "Oh, no she's going to wreck my quiet time." She saw the world differently. "5:00 am? What a great time to be with my Dad."

That morning I chose to see the world your way, Hannah, and I have been blessed with a great father-daughter memory ever since. If I had never taken you on an Amigo ride at 5:00 am in Tiskilwa I never would have seen that beautiful flower growing out of a tree.

So Hannah, and Donny, you have my blessing to see the world through each other's eyes. You have my blessing as you marry today. May you make great husband and wife memories with each other from this day forth. ©

(excerpted from the blessing given by Rich Foss to Hannah and Donny on their wedding day)



Mini Book Review

Jim Fitz
Plow Creek Fellowship

Where the Roots Reach for Water: a Personal and Natural History of Melancholia, by Jeffrey Smith

"Melancholia addresses what it means to be human, forces us to reckon with the constraints of the human condition. And like some spiritual principle, it stands opposed to the great icons of our age: the machine, the marketplace, and the self."
—Jeffrey Smith

Depression can be understood as a desperate attempt by our souls to get hold of our conscious minds to address real pain in our hearts. The author describes depression as a sort of severe friend—a part of ourselves that is really aimed at rescuing and healing ourselves, even though at first evaluation, depression looks so destructive. Strangely, this made a lot of sense to me and brought comfort that my mind wasn't out to destroy me, but out to get me to recognize things I'd ignored or buried for most of my life. Uncovering those things was painful and took difficult work, but it also gave me hope that I could survive that pain, as well as understanding that God is there in the midst of it, no matter how difficult it looks or feels. ©

Getting to Know You

Notes from a Visit with Church of the Servant King—Eugene, Oregon

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

January 14, 2003

I've been corresponding with Church of the Servant King leader, John Stock, who assures me I will be met at the Portland, Oregon airport. Soon after my exit from the plane I saw Katrina Jenkins asking likely-looking men if they are David Janzen. I agree to be David Janzen if she will find me a ride to Church of the Servant King community in Eugene. Brian Logan picks us up at the curb and, after a great Lebanese supper, drives us a hundred miles through the rain to Eugene while I ask him two hundred miles of questions about COSK—yes, that's what the natives call Church of the Servant King.

I learn that COSK has been around since the mid-80's and now numbers about thirty-eight adults and children when they all get together for worship, which makes for a full and lively living room. Most of the COSK members are in their 30's and 40's with growing families. The community life is focused in a couple of large multi-family households and a few smaller groups all within walking distance of each other. Brian is eager to tell me about the coffeehouse ministry where he works about half the time—otherwise he's a pastoral leader for the community. Theo's Coffee House is a low-key way for community members to make conversation with their Eugene neighbors. Many of the coffeehouse patrons, it seems, major in dangling metal, tattoos, brandings, alien sightings, and pagan auras—all of them apparently beloved by God and by Brian, too.

At the Salon household I am introduced to Suzie Logan, whose job title on the community phone list is "home engineer." Four-year-old Kolbe insists on carrying my suitcase—at least the handle—up the stairs to my room. His little sister only wants me to pick her up so she can give the guest a kiss. Everyone in this community, it appears, takes seriously their mission of loving the

guest in the manner of Jesus, the Servant King.

Gradually the rest of the adults of the household—some of them already in pajamas—drift into the kitchen to sample Brian's fresh-sliced, home-brewed ginger tea and to see this new guy who gets asked by each new arrival, "Now where is Reba Place?" Soon we are talking over our shared grief, gratitude and last memories concerning the sudden passing of our common friend Jack Bernard from San Francisco. Then we hear Denise DeBerry tell all about the quality of baby Joe's vomits, his BM's, and why this may or may not mean he'll need an operation for an intestinal obstruction. In other words, I feel like I've already been at COSK half my life among people who have learned to trust and include a guest, wherever his address, just by carrying on normal life in the body of Christ.

It's eerie how much we are "weird" in the same ways. It must be the Holy Spirit.

January 15

I roam the neighborhood and discover that COSK folks are in the middle of a big move. Most of the community members are affected since they work for one of three establishments: Theo's Coffee House, an e-mail book-ordering service for used books of theology and church history called "Windows Booksellers," and Wipf & Stock Publishers which specializes in republishing out-of-print theology books as quickly as the orders come in. All these businesses are moving a couple of blocks from a small storefront to a huge warehouse that is still under renovation.

I find a comfortable chair among the basement book stacks of Windows Booksellers and pretend that I'm in a seminary library—which it could be. Many of these tomes have come from retired seminary professors whom John Stock has cajoled into recycling their books for younger readers. Katrina is at the phone or the computer taking orders, trying to catch up from the days lost in moving.

Rumors circulate that John Stock is looking for me. John is a community leader and the entrepreneur behind all these businesses about theological books. When he finds me, there is a familiar bear hug and gracious greeting. We haven't seen each other



since the Ekklesia Conference in Chicago last June. But John is missing his trademark cigar, for which he mumbles a gruff apology—"Too many people getting concerned about my health." He gives me a quick tour of the place. When the construction work is done, the building will include an indoor mini-mall with several eateries all near the book-selling business and Theo's transplanted coffeehouse. Everyone is excited to show off their much-expanded places of work.

Many things impress me about the life these sisters and brothers share. The love and joy they express across generational lines, from children to teenagers and adults, catches my attention. These folks just love hanging out with each other. Ten adults from the household in one kitchen joyfully cleaning up after a common meal, where each one knows exactly what to do so there are no collisions—this also is a sign of the Holy Spirit's presence. When people love each other in such humble and natural ways, the light of Jesus shines brightly.

January 16

I've been eating at various households and getting to know some of the COSK families and history. I've learned that there used to be three COSK groups—Gardena in California, with affiliated communities in Eugene and Portland Oregon. For many years the community in Gardena was the center from which other community ventures were sent out and nurtured. About four years ago the community in Gardena began to unravel over conflicts with leadership

and other issues that could not be reconciled. COSK in Eugene has carried on with relatively little negative effect on community life, but as individuals they carry deep pain for their long-term friends in Gardena who are now either out of community or out of fellowship with the community in Eugene.

In order to establish accountable relationships with other Christian groups, COSK in Eugene has affiliated with the Ekklesia Project (EP) where John Stock is on the Board of Directors. They have had visits in the past year from Steve Long, Rodney Clapp, and other leaders in the EP network.

My last night at COSK I was asked to speak about Reba and the four Shalom Mission Communities. The more I told our stories, the more I saw heads nodding, recognizing the common experiences of radical-discipleship community life. We compared our structures and community values. Unlike Reba Place Fellowship, where we all share in a common purse, the families at COSK each manage their own finances, but the houses and cars are owned together under a limited liability corporation. There is a covenant life with which gifts of time and possessions flow to those who share a need.

I concluded my talk by reading the shared commitments of our Shalom Mission Communities—simple life, non-violence, sexual integrity, not claiming anything as our own, speaking truth in love, disciplines of prayer and Bible study, solidarity with the poor, making disciples—and at the end there was a moment of silence. Then Suzie Logan spoke, “It’s eerie how much we are ‘weird’ in the same ways. It must be the Holy Spirit.”

I invited COSK to come and stay with their weird friends at Reba this summer when they send folks to the Ekklesia Conference in Chicago. On the way home I marveled, as I have countless other times, how God has brought us together with still more “friends in Christ” we did not know we had. ©

Briars in the Cottonpatch

The new documentary Briars in the Cotton Patch: The Story of Koinonia Farm was shown at the SMC gathering in August. I found its tale of perseverance and faith through incredible opposition very encouraging, and it made me glad of our connections to that steadfast community. The following is from press releases found on the Koinonia website. If you didn't get to see it at the conference, I urge you to find a way to watch it. Koinonia has copies for sale at www.koinoniapartners.org/Bookstore/briars.htm and you can read more about it there too. —ZM

Growing up at Koinonia Farm near Americus, Georgia, Faith Fuller always heard about the turbulent events surrounding the multiracial community during segregation in the 1950s and 1960s. In her new documentary entitled *Briars In The Cotton Patch: The Story of Koinonia Farm*, she aims to shed light on this chapter of Sumter County history.

The idea to create the hour-long documentary formed in October 1999 when Fuller interviewed former Koinonia members for a seven-minute video she was producing for Habitat for Humanity International. During the production, Fuller heard first-hand accounts from people who lived and worked as equals on the multiracial farm in the Deep South, when beliefs in segregating the races ran deep.

Briars in the Cotton Patch explores the unusual story of a community founded on Christ's principles of non-violence and sharing that changed the lives of thousands of people, both within and outside of their community. The members were, and still are, followers of Jesus who actively show their faith in their lives and their social activities. They are “briars” because their lives prick society's norms.

Narrated by former Atlanta Mayor and UN Ambassador Andrew Young, *Briars in the Cotton Patch* follows Koinonia Farm from its humble beginnings in 1942 through the challenges of the 21st century.

One of the most challenging times for Koinonia Farm was during the late 1950s when residents faced down terrifying acts of violence, persecution and terrorism. Koinonia was a constant target of the Ku Klux Klan and the white power structure of Sumter County. Despite months of



Clarence Jordan

frightening attacks—including bombings, shootings and beatings—the violence at Koinonia was disregarded by local, state and federal law enforcement. In fact, local authorities accused Koinonia's residents of committing the violence themselves. Koinonia even survived a damaging county-wide economic boycott.

Why the persecution? The residents of Koinonia Farm radically believed in the equality of all people. Whites and blacks worked and lived together as equals on the farm when segregation was the law of the land. They broke bread together, worshiped together and were ready to die together if necessary. Their actions were prickly dark briars in the pure white southern traditions of the day. But with the undaunted leadership of Koinonia's founder, Clarence Jordan, the small farm not only survived, it helped change the way people—both locally and globally—think and act today.

“As I was interviewing these people, I became fascinated with its story. Even though I grew up at Koinonia, I never took the time to understand it,” said Fuller. “As I listened, I became more drawn into this amazing history.”

The latter part of *Briars* delves into the story of her parents, Millard and Linda Fuller, who moved to Americus in 1977 after founding Habitat for Humanity at Koinonia. The idea of Habitat had taken root at the farm in 1968 after the Fullers decided to give away their possessions to pursue a life of service.

“Clarence said if you are going to be an authentic disciple of Jesus, you have to take Jesus seriously, try to understand what his message really was about and incorporate it in our daily lives,” explains Millard Fuller. “And that is why we started building houses. That was a relevant need in Sumter County.”

In a world where the daily news seems to illustrate only what is fallen and broken in humanity, it's important that we remember that God is at work and can bring beauty from ashes. This story of the witness of Clarence Jordan and the stubborn faithfulness of the members of Koinonia Farm is such a story. ©



Church News

News from San Francisco

Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

Fruit Basket Upset

Since the last issue, we have rearranged our households to suit our new circumstances of departures and arrivals. We've had four new people move in with us who seem to have been sent especially to bless us in the midst of a year of loss and readjustment. Craig Litorja, a longtime friend of Tim Otto's who has visited several times through the years, moved in with the Lockies and Lily. That household had decided to attempt Spanish-speaking mealtimes, both to include Lily more and because little Alexina Lockie (age 1) is definitely going to be a bilingual child, if her mother has anything to say about it—which she does. Craig quickly adapted himself to the household and has been well appreciated for his seven-cheese macaroni, gentle good humor, and wonderful singing voice, among other things.

Craig's arrival was soon followed by Tessa Richardson's, who came to us through her having grown up at Wooden Bridge community in Wisconsin. Even before having met Tessa face to face, I was struck by the earnest and passionate spiritual seeking reflected in her emails to us. This impression proved true in person, and we have been greatly blessed by her honesty and depth already. She is someone with whom it appears to be almost impossible to have a shallow conversation—hang out with Tessa and you're going to talk about Real Stuff. She also moved into the household with the Lockies, Lily, and Craig, into the bedroom which adjoins the room where we worship and hold all church gatherings—a true immersion into Sojourner community life.

Christen Mattix came to us shortly thereafter, our first to find us through our website! She also seemed to arrive with a kind of fragrance about her, a sense of wanting to bring us balm and blessing. She has just begun the Master of Fine Arts program at the San Francisco Art Institute as a painter, and is looking to use her abundant artistic gifts in the service of the Kingdom. She's also been helping to beautify the upstairs flat at 22nd St. where she lives with TimO,

Rick and IvaJo. We are very glad to have her amongst us.

Last week we welcomed Matt Toney, a former Summer Sojourner who came to us through Mission Year. He accompanied us this summer in our Habitat for Humanity project in Fresno, where his Team Matt Toney became the star sheetrockers of the week, finishing an entire garage, ceiling and all. Matt also comes with a spirit of service, depth and enthusiasm that seems to be the trademark of the people God is sending us right now—a whole wave of them, all “coincidentally” arriving within weeks of each other. We're not so dull that we can't recognize God's hand in this bouquet of new arrivals.

And though she doesn't quite fit into the category of “new arrival,” IvaJo Otto certainly fits into the category of one who comes in a spirit of service and blessing, and we are thankful to have her for the rest of her school year at Berkeley. Also, the Guatemala family, Lizbeth, Manuel, and their three chil-

dren Jose, Antonia, and Steven have moved into the Potrero house and seem to have quickly and delightfully blended their lives with the households there, with much traffic of children back and forth between the connecting back door.

Failure is inevitable.
Forgiveness
is possible.

Prayer and Hospitality

We have moved from a time of focus on prayer into a study and meditation on hospitality, a topic which is at the very heart of our life together, and one with much concrete application presently. We have also been challenged to think about hospitality in regards to the several homeless men who come regularly to our worship service and throughout the week to ask for food and showers. In a recent sermon, Debbie articu-



Jesus Vasquez, with help from his mother, signs the paperwork for their Habitat for Humanity house in Fresno, to which Church of the Sojourners contributed “sweat equity.”



Martin Graham shows just how handy he can be—
with behind-the-scenes help from Ransom and Micah Clark.

lated well the seeming paradox of welcoming the guest wholeheartedly and making time for solitude and prayerfulness. She said that if “love God with all your heart, mind and strength and love your neighbor as yourself” is taken as one commandment, then there is no discontinuity between the outwardness of hospitality and the inwardness of prayer. This is the frontier for us right now as a congregation, to learn to live out those two apparent contradictions of active service and contemplative prayer.

A House for Jesus

We spent a toasty week in Fresno in July (the thermometer topped out at 107°, we think) working for Habitat for Humanity, accruing “sweat equity” towards a home for Jesus Vasquez and family. Almost all of us were able to go, and we were also accompanied by most of the Dean family from Plow Creek: Dani and her three sons Josh, Micah and Aaron. The combination of hard work and free time together for play and worship was refreshing. We were also quite affected by the integrity and faithful witness of Tony Miranda, the director of Habitat Fresno, as he was clearly moved by a desire to love and serve those in need in the name of Jesus. Some of us also got to meet Jesus—Vasquez, that is—for the first time, and his gentle humor and graciousness made us feel welcomed and appreciated.

Rites of Passage

Mike Creeger and Dan Zazvorka took

Kevin Casey on the Sojourner tradition known as “rites of passage,” in which older members accompany a younger member on some sort of journey to mark the embarking on a life of following Jesus as an adult. Usually we have done this with our youth in their teens, but Kevin’s time didn’t come for various reasons until now at age 21. The journey began with Kevin being blindfolded and throwing a dart at a map of Mexico to determine their destination. We’re hoping to include a whole article about this in the next issue.

Prayer requests

Louise Harris had major back surgery mid-September, with an estimated five-month recovery period. Please keep her in your prayers. Also, we continue to ask for God’s guidance for Dan and Kelly Zazvorka, as they continue to seek his will for Dan to serve a congregation as a Presbyterian pastor. After spending the summer with us, Judy Alexander returned to Taiwan as a long-term missionary (she was on intern status last year, and went through the process required to receive long-term status). It was quite clear last year that Judy and Taiwan were divinely matched—there has been that wonderful chemistry of having her gifts be perfectly suited to the needs of those around her. Please keep her work there in your prayers this year as well. Dale and Debbie Gish are beginning the adoption process, which by all accounts can be a wild ride—please pray

for them as they embark on bringing a child into their (and our) family.

Ekklesia Project / Shalom Mission Communities Conferences

There is reportage elsewhere in this issue about these piggybacked conferences. About eleven Sojos attended (including Naomi and Leo, and we’re still counting Conrad as a Sojo in this context). An entire newsletter should be devoted to covering all that was addressed in those few days; however, I’ll limit my reflections to a paragraph or two.

A natural harmony between the two different conferences was apparent: the EP conference was themed “Discipleship in a Divided Church” with the opening discussion entitled “The Eucharist and the Fractured Body.” The SMC conference was given to the theme “Friendship in Christ,” with Chris Rice speaking on the painful and glorious process of brokenness and reconciliation in both a friendship and a community that bridged racial barriers. Chris said at one point: “Failure is inevitable. Forgiveness is possible.” This echoed much of what we’d heard in the preceding days in the EP conference: Kyle Childress, a Baptist preacher from Nacogdoches, Texas, said, “If you have a church, you have conflict. How can we become a church that deals with conflict in cruciform ways?” He cited a passage from Acts: “...and there was much debate.” Neither the various speakers from the EP conference nor the SMC conference attempted to answer the question of Christian unity in simplistic ways. I was reminded that the root of the word Israel is to strive, to contend, to wrestle—with God. The encouragement I received from both conferences was to be passionately and humbly in the ongoing conversation—to persevere, wrestle, contend in faith and friendship for one another.



› **Church News** cont on p. 8

News from West Lafayette

Conrad Yoder
Lafayette Christian Fellowship

Greetings from West Lafayette, Ohio (not the big city in Indiana). Margaret and I have just moved here from Church of the Sojourners to be part of Lafayette Christian Fellowship. Since this is our first time in the newsletter, a brief history is in order.

In 1973, Art and Jocele Meyer bought an eighty-acre farm in Coshocton County, Ohio. In 1979, Deerspring Partners Trust was formed, where families could buy into the landshare and each get a five-acre plot. Families there were going to various churches in the region, but a couple years later, four Mennonite couples living at Deerspring decided to form Lafayette Christian Fellowship. They first met in homes, then moved to a local restaurant and rented space there. In 1986, the church decided to join the Ohio Mennonite Conference. Since then, the meeting place has moved two times, first sharing space with a small country Methodist church, then to a storefront in downtown (that term is loosely used here) West Lafayette, where the meetings are today. We are approximately twenty-six people, including four away at college and four others in high school and grade school.

While there is no formal leadership at



Tim Otto

Craig Litorja, Austin Jones and Dan Zazvorka (l to r) from Church of the Sojourners analyze the situation during a Habitat for Humanity project in Fresno, Calif.

LCF, there are three committees which oversee different aspects of the church: the Worship Commission, Body Life Commission, and Mission, Peace and Service Commission. We have a congregational chairperson, which is a rotating position, and most adults in the group take turns leading worship each Sunday.

West Lafayette (population 2,200) is situated in the foothills of the Appalachians, and as such is a somewhat economically depressed area. Over the years, when youth at LCF have gone off to college, most have elected not to return to the area, at least

partially due to the economics here—jobs for well-educated college graduates are not plentiful. People at LCF have been able to get work: there is a professor, tax preparer, doctor, artisan, computer programmer, two teachers, two museum directors and three librarians, along with several retirees.

In current happenings, we are just starting in September to have communion at each Sunday worship service, which was decided after a summer of discussion and waiting. The usual practice before this had been once every third Sunday.

There are two first-timers headed off to college this year along with the others: Todd and Patti Malenke took their son Aaron to Warren Wilson College just outside Asheville, North Carolina, and Steve Rumsey took his daughter Jessie to Berea College in Berea, Kentucky, while Steve's wife Jeri kept things running on the home front.

Despite most LCFers' big summer trips being already finished, there are a few more planned. Todd and Patti will be going to Oakland, California this month for the wedding of Patti's brother, and Ron and Nan Leeseberg are driving west for a couple weeks or a couple months, depending on how things go, visiting old friends "that we haven't seen in forty years," said Ron. They have promised to keep us updated by email on the road.



David Janzen

David Janzen, Heather Munn and Brian Mosher demonstrate how the Reba Intern Program makes saints.



A Strange Way to Welcome

Barbara Bridgewater
Hope Fellowship

My Chicago Fiasco? Mistake by the Lake? A Welcome Not To Be Forgotten? I'm not sure how to title the unusual beginning of my wonderful fellowship time in Evanston. I was able to laugh at it all a week later, and it became the source for many jokes and quips during the weekend. It even became part of a skit for our worship time. But when it was happening, I tearfully regretted ever coming to Evanston for this summer conference.

Upon leaving Bloomington, Illinois, already having traveled over fifteen hours in two days with two small children, I noticed on the map that we were nearing Chicago, set to arrive around 4:00 p.m. I didn't like the idea of going through the downtown area during rush hour. I called Peggy and asked for directions around the city, but the person who answered the phone didn't know of any other way to get to 722 Monroe Street. She said I'd be lucky to reach the house for 6:00 supper. So I used my fifth-grade map skills and noticed that a loop went around the north of the city and decided to take it.

I was congratulating myself on getting to Evanston by 4:15, as the girls and I repeatedly sang Moose verses for our Lack of Talent Show song. Once in Evanston, though, I got lost around Sherman St., and decided to ask for directions. Right about that time, Clare (my 3-year-old) announced she needed to go potty. No one seemed to know where Monroe Street was, but one store clerk pointed me to the police station, where someone would surely know, and—more urgently now—where there would be a bathroom.

As we entered the police station, I first found the bathroom, a few feet down the hall. After putting Clare on the potty, I asked Hannah (age 7) to stand in the doorway, where she could see both Clare and watch me in the line to talk to the police clerk. After about ten minutes, I asked a policeman in the hall if he knew where Monroe Street was. He said it was about a half-mile

away. I was so relieved!

I returned to the bathroom where Clare was happily sitting on the potty, as if we weren't hungry and tired and hot after traveling seven hours. I asked her if she was finished and she politely said, "No," and then I asked her to get down and get going. She started screaming, one of those tantrum screams that I know echoed throughout the hall... I asked her several times to get down, and then I took her off the potty, trying to put her pull-up on. She refused, screaming the whole time, and I spanked her once on the bottom. A few seconds later, a police-woman opened the door to the restroom, asking what was the trouble, and I calmly explained (with Clare still screaming). She then asked to talk with us, and led us into a waiting room.



That began our two hours in the Evanston police station. The first policewoman talked courteously with me and the girls and repeatedly apologized for making us wait, saying they were trying to find someone to talk with me. I remained calm, explaining to Hannah that anytime someone needs help they should go to the police, and these police folks were just trying to make sure we were okay since Clare was screaming so loudly. (Clare at this point was her happy-go-lucky self, entertaining all the different police persons with inquiries about their purses, makeup, and guns.)

The second policeman was also courteous, as we chatted about families. I could imagine the mental picture forming in his mind based on a famous group from Waco: a homeschooling mother from Waco, attending some kind of religious conference, and BEATING HER CHILDREN.

He began asking other questions of us, and then I began to cry softly, hanging on to the girls who were asking me why I was

crying. He too, asked me. I told him that I was humiliated and when he asked why, I told him that I had done nothing wrong and just wanted to get to where I needed to be. He said he thought I was lost, and I repeated that I had been lost, but now I knew where to go. He looked confused. I asked him if he ever spanked his four children and he quickly admitted yes, and I said that it was hard to be interrogated because of that action. Then he really looked confused. "Why are you in here?" he asked. "Because I spanked my little girl," I said. He quickly got up from the table and said that he thought I was there because I was lost. I laughed—and then cried a little harder as I shook my head. He left the room with a puzzled look on his face.

He returned and began asking me more questions, including how I came up from Waco, how long it took, how I got lost, how I thought I would get to Monroe St. I thought it odd that he wanted the Interstate route numbers, but I gave him the general idea. Finally when he questioned how long it would take to where I had to go and I repeated it was only another half mile, which would only take a few minutes to drive, he exclaimed "You mean you're in a car?" I was so shocked that I stopped crying. "What did you think—that I walked here?" He obviously had. He again excused himself and somewhat angrily left the room.

Some moments later, a different officer came in the room and asked me quite frankly if I needed anything and if I was okay. I said I just wanted to get on my way. He said goodbye and we walked out of there, greatly relieved. (Later Hannah would say to her daddy, "I didn't *think* they would put Mommy in jail...")

By the time I arrived not five minutes later to 722 Monroe St., it was 5:50, just in time for supper. I could only cry when Peggy and Irene greeted us, and they led us to the garden to sit awhile before supper. It wasn't until we gathered around the table that I found my voice to explain my unusual welcome to their city. As expected, we laughed, fumed, and agreed that this story would be worth many repetitions and jokes for the conference and the future.

I now can write and talk about this with no tears, grateful that we have a police force that cares about children crying, glad to really have had a place at 722 Monroe St. to come to in a big city like Chicago, glad in the end that my children and I were able to participate in the wonderful fellowship of Reba Place and the rest of the Shalom Missions group. ④

Spiritual Battle at Pratt and Ashland

Patty Peebles

Living Water Community Church

New on the Block

Our family is new to Living Water Community Church (LWCC), and thus even newer to the Shalom Mission Communities. Observing the friendships at the recent Shalom Reunion, hearing the stories and meeting new friends all made for a good experience. After one conversation in particular, someone suggested I write out what is happening in our neighborhood so that you, our brothers and sisters, can be in prayer with us about how we respond as a part of Christ's body here in Rogers Park.

By way of very simple introduction, we, the Peebles family, have been living in Rogers Park for two years, and in Chicago for ten. (I grew up north of the city and Tim is from Springfield, Illinois—which, he is quick to point out to urban-centric Chicagoans, IS the actual capital of this state.) This is our fourth year at LWCC. We have been part of the Fellowship of Rogers Park cell group for two years. Both our church and cell group have been a source of challenge, growth and blessing for us over this time.

And a tragic story

One October afternoon two years ago, as school was letting out, many of us heard a deafening commotion rising at the intersection of Pratt and Ashland, our front yard. Looking out the window we saw many high school-aged youths on different corners yelling at one another and shaking angry fists. We've lived here long enough to recognize the difference between rowdy kids goofing off and trouble brewing. This seemed the latter. Several kids were fighting on our front lawn. The larger crowds were both cheering that on and taunting one another. Soon afterwards, a police officer got out of her car and broke up that fight—which is to say, tried to stop the last few youths who hadn't run off when they saw the lights flashing. I remember seeing her speaking into a walkie-

talkie, calling for help, as she walked across the street to break up the other crowds before something worse happened.

At that moment, a grey car pulled up and someone in it fired a gun into the crowd across the street, sending children screaming and running in panic, and leaving three young men lying on the pavement—two injured and one murdered. The car drove away, only to be apprehended a few blocks east. We later found out that the shooting was part of a vendetta against someone who had offended the girlfriend of a gang member. Five men in the car from their late teens to late twenties were arrested. Our LWCC kids knew some of the kids involved. We were all horrified to see such violence acted out before our eyes.

Compelled to pray on that corner

Many from our church, particularly our youth, felt compelled to begin praying on the corner of the 1600 Pratt Building. For years it has been known as a problem spot in our neighborhood. Gang rivalries and drug deals are daily activities there. So for over a year, every Sunday night, members of our church have met to pray on that corner, claiming Christ's light and healing in this place of darkness. Word came out that some kind of retaliation would be staged on the anniversary of the shooting. At the same time as the shooting, many from our church gathered to pray against further violence and for God to show us how to be present there

as citizens of Christ's kingdom. While we prayed, some knelt, laying hands on the sidewalk, claiming God's sovereignty over the powers of darkness that have left people crippled by drugs, violence and a feeling that they belong nowhere.

We have seen or heard many more shootings—some in the night, some in broad daylight. One neighbor's car was hit while she waited at the stoplight on a Sunday evening at 8 p.m. The first shot shattered her driver's side window, the second left a hole in the rear driver's side panel. She was unharmed, but frightened.

Our neighborhood is gentrifying, like many others in cities all over. Buildings are rehabbed and "going condo". There are also scattered public housing units, housing co-ops, buildings plagued with drug dealing and tenants struggling to survive on the edges of society.

Building community

There are strong bonds of community in our building, where our church brothers and sisters live upstairs and downstairs, or where church families live down the alley from each other. Living here has included many wonderful community-building experiences, like our son learning cricket from the Pakistani-American kids next door, a building-wide water "fight" one hot, hot summer evening, and a host of joyful, sad, enriching, and overwhelming experiences in between. We pray God's mercy for our neighborhood,



At the vigil at 1600 Pratt Ave.

Lisa Selph



› Church News cont from p. 8

News from Tiskilwa

Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

knowing that in our fear and limitations, God is unchanged and never leaves us.

So here we are, this little, urban, Mennonite church. We have a budget crunch like most folks. We aren't always sure how to come alongside our neighbors in public housing or how to make connections with young kids considering gang affiliation. We aren't sure where we'll be worshipping come December since the church we've met in is ending our lease. Many of us have been praying that God will make available the 1600 Pratt Building across the street where so much of the violence has happened. We want to be faithful to God, to be light and salt here in this place where we feel so ill equipped to get over racial, economic, social, and ethnic boundaries.

I hasten to add that many people in this church, both Fellowship folks and not, have been here much longer than Tim and I, and have seen and done much more than we have. But I wanted you to know a bit of the difficulties this neighborhood is facing, and thus the context where this church is working out its identity as God's people. We know without question that God is bigger than the sufferings we see around us. We know that Jesus' kingdom has already come and while we see the groaning of creation around us, we can look with eyes of hope, beyond what we see across the street, and what we hear on the corners.

Please pray with us that we would be willing to risk doing whatever we sense God's spirit is prompting us to do, that we would listen with open hearts and imaginations fired by the hope God has given us in Jesus' resurrection and invitation to new life. Thank you, dear brothers and sisters for your prayers. And peace be with you. ☺

Patty Peebles is married to Tim Peebles, parents of nine-year-old Nicholas. They are exploring communal membership within the Fellowship of Rogers Park.

August 16 was a very special day for Heidi Foss and Woju Worabo who were married at Camp Menno Haven. There were many Ethiopian guests present, including Woju's parents and siblings. It was a beautiful 5 p.m. formal wedding with the lake as a backdrop. The heat and humidity were tremendously high and emotions ran high, as well. Rich Foss began with a reading of Psalm 108. Joy abounded as two cultures were brought together and participated in the ceremony. Much of the music was sung in English and in Amharic (Woju's mother tongue in Ethiopia). Yeshitla Mengistu, who gave the meditation, mentioned that he had taken Woju's family to visit the gravesite of Heidi's grandfather. (Sarah's father was killed during his missionary service in Ethiopia.) The wedding feast was wonderful, too. There was a lot of very special food, and we learned how to eat Ethiopian sauces over *injera* bread (made from the ancient grain *teff*—interesting to find on the internet). There was further celebration in dance and in sharing family stories that brought to reality a picture of the worldwide Kingdom of God.

For some of us who attended the SMC conference in Evanston it was encouraging to hear from Chris and Donna Rice and to

read the book *Grace Matters*. Chris shared very openly about weaknesses and emotional times living in an interracial household at Voice of Calvary, and yet they learned to live in the grace of God and claim that God's love was sufficient way beyond all the human efforts that weren't working.

Meghan Reha is off to Bethel College, following a time-honored SMC tradition of attending Bethel. Others who have gone before include members of the Gale, Wetzel, Begly, Lehman, and Belser families... often departing in the brown Plow Creek van that has packed in students, bicycles, and many furnishings.

Jim Fitz and Erin Kindy are applying for visas to Colombia in September and are hoping to be going through CPT. Keep them in your prayers.

We had a four-person delegation attend a recent Theophostic workshop in Naperville, Illinois. It was a real treat to have Ed Smith, the originator of Theophostic prayer, lead the workshop. There is always more to learn!

Matt Reha has resigned from Habitat, New Orleans and is headed to Goshen, Indiana to earn some money for his next life adventure.

The remodeling of the children's playroom upstairs in the common building is nearing completion so that two small rooms joined by a very big door will be usable this fall as we worship together. We are glad that adult supervision of small children should be easier. ☺



Boo Graham and Margaret Brabham sing a version of *Carmen* at the Lack of Talent Show, updated to include current SMC theological controversies.

Patty Peebles

Crazy Dreams

Three highlights from the 2003 SMC Reunion: An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

It happened our first night in the Plow Creek retreat cabin, about two weeks after the August Shalom Mission Communities Reunion. Joanne and I arrived exhausted. I was worn out from leading two workshops at the Ekklesia Project Conference and from coordinating the SMC Reunion that immediately followed it, and from trying to catch up on everything else that had meanwhile fallen behind in the Reba Fellowship office. I know God's blessing was over these events in wonderful ways. But they were something of a blur to me because I could not stop thinking about my responsibilities enough to just take in the grace of it all.

In this dream several of us were reclining on all sides of a king-sized bed, gathered around a raised dish situated between us, on which was spread a large flatbread like Ethiopian *injera* or a super-sized pita. In the middle of the bread rose a generous moun-

tain of stew. (I'm sure it was vegetarian since otherwise I wouldn't have been so relaxed eating it.) We tore off pieces of bread and scooped up morsels of stew to carry into our mouths. We savored the moment, licking our fingers with festive gusto, looking into the eyes of our friends around the circle in the deepest joy of fellowship.

This supper scene, no doubt, was triggered by Chris Rice's sermon from the Shalom reunion that Joanne and I had listened to again on our drive to Plow Creek. Chris described Jesus' last meal with his disciples, reclining face to face, confiding to them his love and final instructions. "You are my friends if you do what I command you. I do not call you servants any longer, because the servant does not know what the master is doing; but I have called you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have heard from my Father... I am giving you these commands so that you may love one another."

I think my dream also anticipated the wedding to come that night of Heidi Foss and Woju Worabo, and the Ethiopian feast that Woju's relatives had been cooking up for several days in the Plow Creek kitchen.

Anyway, the solemn and joyful meal in my dream began to slide toward chaos with the discovery that the stew was overflowing the round bread and dish, issuing into a small river of gravy across the covers, sheet,

and probably soaking into the mattress of the bed as well. Joanne, next to me, became quite agitated and went into high gear trying to salvage the bedding. We were guests in someone else's home. Joanne insisted we had to get the bedding washed and dried and everything quickly put back the way it was before our hosts would return and find this mess!

I am amazed that
through it all
Jesus did not try
to take charge,
did not try to prevent
the mess of people
doing what they
were going to do.

I also remember Barbara Bridgewater in her loud voice and energetic manner, trying, with good cheer, to counter the spirit of anxiety and catastrophe that was overtaking us all. "Hey guys, don't worry. This will all come out OK. Look at this as some kind of wonderful adventure. I bet we'll all look back on it one day and think it was hilarious. We can even make a skit of it at our next Lack of Talent Show!" Aw, shut up, Barbara.

Meanwhile, Joanne was tugging at the sheets while some of us were trying to eat faster to catch the stew before more of it would run over the edge. But the stew was growing in quantity more quickly than we could eat it, rising and bubbling up like a cauldron gone berserk. And the more we moved around trying to fix things, the more we threatened to dump over the raised dish of food in the middle of a *bed*—of all places. And whose crazy idea was it to eat in a guest bed anyway?!

As coordinator of Shalom Missions Communities I felt like I should somehow assert control of the situation, but I was too exhausted to have any idea how to manage this solemn and holy event rapidly sliding down the slippery slope into hell. I was clearing my throat to make my "take charge" speech when I woke up and found myself on another mattress, next to an asleep and totally peaceful Joanne, and immensely relieved to not have to make a speech for which I had no idea what to say.

That dream tells way too much about the fear of chaos that motivates my actions and the illusions of getting things under control that stand in the way of living by faith.



Patty Peebles

David Janzen shows author Chris P. Rice the advantages of cross-media advertising in his new book with the cereal giant, Ralston Foods.



Patty Peebles

Teri Creeger's interpretation of *My beloved's nose is like a tower* from Song of Solomon.

A week before the 2003 Shalom Reunion at Reba, we had no way to make all the preparations come out in time before the guests would arrive. But God sent one guest a week early. From Koinonia Partners community came Victoria Higham, willing to simply help in any way she could. And Reba Intern Heather Munn likewise threw herself into setup arrangements even though she would have to be elsewhere during the Reunion.

By God's grace, the messes I feared did not happen. Instead we remembered and celebrated three great gifts of God's grace. Everyone I have talked to about the 2003 Shalom Reunion agrees on the same highlights.

West Side Christian Parish in the early 60's

The first evening we heard stories from Julius and Peggy Belser, Hilda Carper, Albert Steiner, Margaret and David Gale, and Allan and Jeanne Howe, who lived together in the Church of Hope, an interracial community practicing "all things in common" on the west side of Chicago in the early 60's under the sometimes desperate conditions of Chicago's poorest neighborhood. But God sustained this outpost of the Westside Christian Parish through fires and other near disasters until the bulldozers of urban renewal wiped out the neighborhood. But these brief years together in humble service forged enduring friendships and a way of life that has sustained two communities ever since: Reba and Plow Creek Fellowship.

Grace matters in the Antioch Community

Our guest speaker Chris Rice spoke to us with profound and disturbing honesty of his friendship with Spencer Perkins and their efforts to lead a community of blacks and whites together in a Christ-reconciled life. Their joys in a shared life were profound, but the forces they battled of institutional racism, internalized oppression, and their own personal demons almost defeated community until John and Judy Alexander helped them discover the resources of God's amazing grace. I won't try to tell the story that you can find in Chris's book, *Grace Matters*. Once again, we witnessed the power of transforming friendships forged in a life never under human control, always on the edge of disaster, and yet God-directed.

Briars in the Cotton Patch

David Castle, chairman of the board at Koinonia Partners in Americus, Georgia, came to show us *Briars in the Cotton Patch*. This is a new documentary of Koinonia Farm's early years when Clarence Jordan was moved by the Spirit of Jesus to gather a community of blacks and whites in a life of shared work and table fellowship. Bombings, murderous threats and a racist boycott almost snuffed out this demonstration plot God's kingdom.

At the conclusion of this movie, Julius Belser told of a visit from Clarence Jordan in the 1960's, when Clarence was most discouraged and wanted to give Koinonia Farm to

Reba Place. Though almost dead, God resurrected Koinonia, giving birth to a generation of risk-taking disciples including Millard and Linda Fuller, who, starting on Koinonia soil, transplanted Habitat for Humanity around the world. Their daughter Faith Fuller, born at Koinonia, is the producer of this inspiring movie.

We could not help but marvel at our incredibly rich heritage of friends and faithful witnesses. But celebrating these gifts and heritage is not enough. We believe that God will bring new people with new visions of Gospel reconciliation to which we will add our bodies, experience and treasure.

But I am still haunted by my dream and by Jesus' intimate last supper with his disciples that slid quickly into the chaos and hell of his betrayal, arrest, abandonment and crucifixion. I am amazed that through it all Jesus did not try to take charge, did not try to prevent the mess of people doing what they were going to do.

And yet, by the Father's grace, he was in charge of his own spirit, a faithful witness to God's love and forgiveness to the end. By trusting in the Father's resurrection power he could remain truthful, non-violent and reconciling, winning a place for us all in his movement of grace. This weird dream keeps reminding me that the kingdom will not come under our control. Nevertheless, it has come, it keeps coming, and will be there complete when the last disaster has run its course.

Barbara is right. "Don't worry. It will all turn out OK." ©



Pat's Book

It Takes a Village (or Two) To Make a Wedding

Rich Foss
Plow Creek Fellowship

14 August 2003

Dear folks,

Several years ago Hillary Clinton used an African proverb as the title of a book she wrote: *It takes a village to raise a child*.

Around the same time Heidi told me that she sensed that she was called to be a nurse in Africa. All I could think was: Africa is so far away. What I said was, "Since you are taking Spanish in school, maybe you should consider Latin America." I was thinking, Latin America is closer.

"No," she said with her inimitable, gentle certainty. "No, I think it's Africa."

I hid this in my heart.
But not before thinking, "Lord, if you are calling her to Africa, I sure hope you give her a good husband to go with her to Africa."



Heidi Foss and Woju Worabo

Now Heidi is getting married to Woju in two days. I can't help but smile as I think, "Lord, I never thought of this good husband I wanted to go with her as an Ethiopian—but what a good idea!"

For the last few weeks two villages have been hard at work preparing for the wedding. When Woju's parents arrived three weeks ago they gathered their family and Ethiopian friends in the USA around to begin to plan for the wedding.

And at Plow Creek, our little global village practicing the peace of Jesus, Lyn Fitz has taken the lead in helping us prepare to host the wedding and many wedding guests.

This morning I was near tears of gratitude in my quiet time as I thought about all the Plow Creek people who are helping with the wedding, many more than I know and doing more tasks than I may ever know.

When we moved here in 1977, we hoped this would be a good place to raise our children. We had never heard the African proverb *it takes a village to raise a child*, but we instinctively knew this was true.

Now we know it takes two villages to make a wedding.

Blessings, Rich



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