

Shalom Connection Friends, We Invite You To A Conference/Family Camp/Reunion

July 31–August 3, 2003

“Friendship in Christ” will be our conference theme this year. We hope you can share our excitement. Make plans to join us at Reba Place Fellowship from Thursday noon (July 31) through Sunday evening (August 3). Stay with us and attend all three events.

A Conference with Ekklesia Project: Our Shalom Connections event is scheduled to dovetail with the Ekklesia Project Conference at DePaul University, just a 20-minute El ride from Reba. Shalom communities will present three workshops on shared economic practices at the EP Conference that ends on Saturday noon. (Check out <http://www.EkklesiaProject.org> on the web.)

A Family Camp: Meanwhile, Shalom Communities will run a family camp during the times of the Ekklesia Project Conference for kids and those who have heard enough theology. The Family Camp will include informal times together at the beach, Lincoln Park Zoo, or the Reba Activities Center.

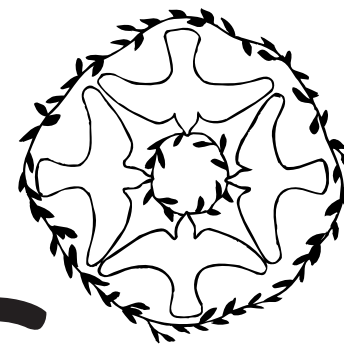
A Shalom Connections Reunion: Shalom Connections folks will gather at Reba on Friday night (a gap in the EP Conference schedule), Saturday afternoon and all day Sunday. We look forward to a “Lack of Talent” show on Saturday night and worship with Reba Place Church or Living Water Community Church in Rogers Park on Sunday morning. We anticipate a rich time of storytelling, feasting, worship, and reflections on the amazing friendships we have with and because of Jesus. After all, what is Christian community but a school of friendship? More details will be coming your way soon in a brochure and registration form.

—David Janzen, SMC Coordinator

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Shalom Connections

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The Search for the Perfect Church

Jaime Zazvorka-Trapnell
Christian Encounter Ministries

In the fall of 2001 I found myself on an airplane headed to Jacksonville, Florida where my new adventure would start as a YWAMer. I was headed off to do my Discipleship Training School (DTS) in Florida with Youth With a Mission. I really did not know what to expect—it was a real leap of faith for me. I soon found out that I would be living in a house with three other girls, attending a lot of lectures by different speakers, doing outreach in the community, and spending the next three months preparing for an adventurous, challenging outreach in another country. All feasible activities to me. There were many areas of my DTS that I felt my background in community living had prepared me for: living with others in peace (most of the time), listening to long teachings many times a week, preparing to share my life with others in very tangible ways. However, I soon met with a very large obstacle that living in community had not prepared me for: the search for the perfect church.

As part of the program we were expected to attend church regularly at least once a week. We could choose where, with whom, which day, etc. I had never been faced with this dilemma—

› *The Search* cont on p.15



HEREAFTER
A drawing on the subject of leaving home,
by Matt Creeger.

The Making of a Pilgrim

Or, how to receive life instead of “making a living”

Paul Rhode (as told to David Janzen)
On Pilgrimage

What brought you to Reba?

Last summer I was walking my fourth pilgrimage, which started from my parents' home in Florida, and I'd come as far as Chicago. I was planning to continue south again, but stopped by Reba Place church one Sunday to visit. (I'd heard about Reba on my way north.) After church, Allan and Jeanne Howe invited me to dinner. And several days later they mentioned that the Clearing household had just started looking for someone to help care for Bob Lembke (who has muscular dystrophy). It seemed like a good fit, so I decided to stay all winter. I was glad to spend an extended time to learn more about the community, and this seemed like a place where I could be useful through the winter (when I usually am not walking). I'd been praying for such a place.

Reba has been different for me because I'm used to talking with people from mainstream America with its unquestioning

patriotism, consumerism and pursuit of wealth. In the wider society I attempt to be a challenging presence on these issues. Here, I immediately felt comfortable in the atmosphere of simplicity, nonviolence, and care for the poor and the stranger (which is usually me when I'm on the road). I realized these brothers and sisters already have heard God in these areas. So I've tried to emphasize even more that “the kingdom of God is among you,” as Jesus said, and to balance the strong recognition of the world's injustice (that I've found here) with a strong faith that everything is securely in God's hands. I think a stronger awareness of God's providence and the present kingdom of God allows us to follow Jesus more closely. For example, growing from an appreciation and concern for the poor to becoming “the poor” ourselves, as Jesus did. So that the power of God might be seen more clearly through our weakness.

Sometimes, even if he has to do it alone and his conduct seems to be crazy, a man must set an example, and so draw men's souls out of their isolation, and spur them to some act of brotherly love.

I'm expecting to start walking again in late May, east towards Pennsylvania, New York and Connecticut—depending on how long it takes and what God shows me. I plan to meet up with a man I discovered and corresponded with this winter, George Walter, who has been “on pilgrimage” like me for over thirty years. We're hoping to walk together for a while. Then I'll turn around and hopefully arrive back at Reba Place before winter.

How did you get on the road?

I joined the Navy while I was still at the University of Michigan. I worked with the nuclear reactors, as an officer on an aircraft carrier. But as I grew in my faith during those four years in the Navy, I noticed an increasing tension. It became clear that I had to choose between following Jesus and being a military officer. So I left—went AWOL. (Not recommended, by the way.) After five months, I realized I needed to turn myself



Paul Rhode on pilgrimage poses with a young friend.

in and face the consequences, and God provided the strength. I only served two days in the brig, and happily agreed to an “other than honorable” discharge.

After that, I joined the Dominican order (Roman Catholic). I was attracted by St. Dominic, who like St. Francis, was an itinerant, mendicant preacher. At the time, I felt I needed the institutional support (and a pulpit) to be a preacher. But after three years of my attempts to work within the system, they decided I was “not fitting in” and asked me to leave.

Soon after, in the spring of 2000, I started my first pilgrimage. It began as a backpacking trip on the Appalachian Trail, which I followed for about 550 miles. That was my “forty days in the wilderness,” preparing physically, mentally and spiritually for what God would have me do next. Then I got off the trail, got rid of most of my gear—tent, sleeping bag, extra clothes—and started walking secondary highways from town to town. After two weeks, I spent a week resting and praying in a monastery, then started out again, this time without any money.

I didn't make any special vow, I just wanted to experience the way Jesus sent out his disciples to proclaim the kingdom. I recognized there was important witness value (as well as a means of spiritual growth) in this pattern of life, trusting God to protect and to provide wherever I would go. As for preaching, I tried to take St. Francis' advice: “Preach the gospel always and, if necessary, use words.”

› *The Making* cont on p.14

› *The Search* cont from p.1

the dilemma of “church shopping.” Where do I go? What do I look for? What do I want in a church? How do you find a church to connect to in three months? Where do I start? Fortunately and unfortunately, Jacksonville is blessed with a number of churches, so I started with the first one I was invited to. It was quite a large church; I don't even remember what denomination. The worship was quite different than anything I had ever experienced. There were brightly dressed women carrying flags and ribbon dancing everywhere. People danced, lay, kneeled, while we awkwardly stood and sang. The sermon was moving, a special presentation from a pastor from Central America about how the Holy Spirit was moving through the church in his country. There began my journey.

I soon met with a very large obstacle that living in community had not prepared me for: the search for the perfect church.

I visited church upon church, Baptist, Episcopal, Catholic, Presbyterian, non-denominational; I don't think I even knew the difference. There was the church that had the air conditioning on so high that you had to wear layers when it was 90 degrees outside. I always thought it was to boost the coffee sales after church. I visited a church so dead and so dry you wondered at how much effort it must take for its members to keep getting up and coming Sunday after Sunday. I visited churches who chanted in worship, those who danced, some with huge bands and bright lights. For communion we would go forward and kneel, pass the tray, or stand in a line and open our mouths to receive. There were offerings and sermons, announcements and invitations to events I would never go to by people I would never see again. Week after week I would drag myself out of bed, dreading the next church encounter. It was such a lonely, frustrating time for me. I often discussed different churches with different friends, feel out recommendations or know which ones to avoid. Some of my friends were looking for the perfect worship, the perfect pastor, the perfect size, the perfect communion, the perfect welcome. I was looking for family,

for a sense of belonging, for deep fellowship. Something I could not find. Something I longed for.

What is church to me? I still don't have the answer to that question. I don't know if it is good or bad, right or wrong, but I believe living in church community has ruined me for traditional church. I feel extremely blessed, as well as cursed, for growing up in such a church.

I believe God knew my desire and longing for a church where I could experience family, fellowship beyond Sunday morning, friendships deeper than “It's a beautiful day, isn't it?” This past year he led my new husband Marvin and I to Christian Encounter Ministries. Marvin was an intern for this ministry and is now fulltime staff, and I recently joined him there. CEM is a ministry that takes in young people ages 16-25 who are battling this world. Some come to finish high school, others to escape abuse or family problems, drugs, alcohol, eating disorders, etc. All come to learn to follow Jesus, receive a new family, and grow into the person and the potential God wants for them. We have been fortunate to become a part of this ministry. The ministry also functions as a church and large family into which Marvin and I felt very welcomed. Our desire for community living has been met here. Marvin works with many of the staff, interns and students on a daily basis. On Sunday we have a small worship service together. We are beginning to bond with the people there in very tangible, real ways. It is a live, thriving family. It does not exactly fit into the category of the perfect church, but I think I have learned in my search that there is no “perfect” church, but that Christ's perfect love can find its way into all sorts of gatherings of his people. I have come to see that church is not the routine we go through, but the people we go through it with. Buildings are not my church. Worship is not my church. Pastors are not my church. Communion and offerings are not my church. Until we all go home, I am called to love and serve those around me, those God has placed as my brothers and sisters. This is my church. ©

› *Conquerors* cont from p.11

powers of this world cannot control, and it makes them furious.

Sometimes empires are less evil or more evil in their policies. And we have a responsibility to speak to these issues, especially for the sake of those who suffer around the world. However, the world's way is to convince us that we have to support our emperor in his struggle for dominion so that our superior virtue can make a difference in the world. This is largely an illusion. None of the world's powers aim for the reconciliation with their enemies, confessing and forgiving sins, or solidarity with the poor that is linked in the Gospels to eternal life. Our calling is to be baptized into the death of Jesus who resurrects us to live with joy beyond the fear of death, bearing a faithful witness, to make socially visible with our own vulnerable flesh the kingdom of God in and for this world. Our mission is to live a life and a witness whose values are worthy of the love God has for our children, and for all the children of the world. ©



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How Many Ways Can a Person Leave Home?

Gabriela Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

I left home when I moved four miles away to college. Sometimes the distance seems farther because everyday I walk around in a world of books, eccentric professors and international students from as far away as New Hampshire and Pakistan. All the same, I still live in my hometown, and I see my family every week. Occasionally, someone will still ask me, “So when are you leaving home?” I always have the urge to wink and reply, “Wouldn’t you like to know...” Of course, I always give the person a few serious answers, but the truth is I do not know which way I should leave home.

Does leaving home mean that I live

forty miles away instead of four? Maybe I should leave Texas altogether because that would be like moving to another country. Have I really left home if I only see my parents over Thanksgiving or Christmas? Will I have left home if my family has to explain to me the jokes that are told around the dinner table?

If I catch up on the life in my church by reading the SMC newsletter, have I left home? Would I be far away from home if I only warmed a pew in church on Sunday morning and Wednesday evening? Would I completely leave home if I became an atheist? Or maybe I could partially leave home by joining my Muslim friends in their faith. On the other hand, if I went the route of my evangelistically-driven friends and destroyed the home of my Muslim friends, would I lose my own home?

Do I need to be married to have my own home to leave home? Do I even need to be married to have my own home?

If I became a Republican, would I have left home to the point of never returning? What would become of my home if I drove an SUV and ate on paper plates everyday?

Have I left home when my body grows old, and I have too many wrinkles to name?

Could I leave home by trading in my curly brown hair for one that is silky straight

and blonde and then buy a few sorority sisters with whom I could sip mocha frappuccinos topped with whipped cream and sprinkles at Starbucks?

If I became a Republican, would I have left home to the point of never returning?

As I graduate from college and find myself coming and going from my parents’ house, I realize that home is more than a physical place. Home is the relationships I share with my family, it is my church, my faith, and the friendship I offer to people of other faiths. My values and my point of view are also elements of my home. Sometimes my body feels like my most basic home, but other times it can feel like a foreign place.

Leaving home can be as simple as a physical action like moving, or it can be a rejection of these other elements. And when everyone else is telling me to leave home, sometimes God is only asking me to enlarge my home by modifying my values or by accepting new people into what I consider family and church. ☺

in loving people with God’s love. I’d like to help people to do this. And I’ve found I can often help them without “preaching” anything with words. I try to draw them to the poor and the stranger, and help them experience the joy and satisfaction of loving. I want to make it easier for people to trust, to let down their guard. And I want to set up a situation where people can more easily understand (and feel) how they participate in God’s love of the world. (Or a challenging situation, for those who choose not to participate in God’s love.)

In taking on this pilgrimage lifestyle, one thing I had to overcome was the pressure to “make a living,” to “pay your own way.” Through my experiences these past three years, and meditating on Jesus’ life and teaching, I realized he offers a different model of how we are to interact with one another. I think this can be summed up in “freely you have received, freely give.” So when we work and produce something to offer others, we should make it a gift. And trust God to inspire others to supply our needs through their gifts. It’s not a model of

independence, but of mutual dependence and faith, which is the path to freedom.

It’s a tremendous feeling to know the food you eat, the clothes you wear, the roof over your head—it’s all literally a gift from someone, and from God. This way of giving and receiving fills all our exchanges with moral and spiritual value, not just economic value. And gifts are more easily seen as acts of love. That’s why I intentionally don’t “make a living.” I receive life from God and my brothers and sisters.

How do you know you’re following the voice of God?

I remember one day on the road thinking that the voice of God comes to us from many directions at once. In many different ways, but with a strong unison to it—many experiences all saying “yes” in the same way. That’s how God’s voice “sounds” to me. And when I attempt to follow that voice, often into great risks—which means if it isn’t God I’m going to crash quickly—then I feel his support, as if the ground is rising up to meet my feet. And this reassures me to keep walking in the Way. ☺

Shalom Connections

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

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Classifieds

Youth Week with Habitat for Humanity

Church of the Sojourners is sponsoring a youth week open to all junior high and high school-age folk. The week will be a good opportunity for youth from different

Home /s Where the Heart Is

Marvin Trapnell
Christian Encounter Ministries

Christian Encounter Ministries is home, at least for a while, to many different people. From the students who come wanting help, and the interns who come wanting help, to the staff and their families, some of which have called CEM home for twenty-plus years. It’s also home, in a sense, to countless people around the world who will never forget the time they spent here. Many of these people left tough situations at home to come to CEM looking for help and peace.

Warm beds, square meals, plenty of couches, multiple back yards, and—oh yeah—a basketball court (an essential ingredient of a good home in my opinion).

Christian Encounter has all the physical attributes of a good home. Warm beds, square meals, plenty of couches, multiple back yards, and—oh yeah—a basketball court (an essential ingredient of a good home in my opinion). There are also many of the spiritual and emotional qualities of a good home: love, accountability, laughter, tears, victory and joy. And most of all the umbrella of Christ’s love and truth covering every building and blade of grass.

So when thinking about what makes

communities to connect. We will help build a house for a guy named Jesus Vasquez and his family. Jesus came from Mexico when he was 18 years old, and was hit by a truck, which left him a quadriplegic. The week of July 19-27 is when it all takes place in sunny Fresno, California. Contact Tim Otto at TimOtto@churchofthesojourners.org or (415) 647-1749 for more information. ☺

a good home, I thought, why not ask the people who live and work here? Here are some of the responses I received as I played reporter one evening.

One student told me, “Home is a place where you feel secure and cared for.”

Another said, “Where you never feel lonely.”

I heard many words and phrases: stable, Christ-centered, welcoming, safe, and many more. One line that stuck with me was “Home is a place where I can always feel safe to tell the truth no matter what I have done.” One intern told me, “Home is being with people you love.” Another said “Sweet Home Alabama.” One kid said “Roseville” —I think he misunderstood the question. The word I heard the most was love. I know love may seem like a general and very overused term, but as the scriptures say: “The greatest of these is love.” Without love it is impossible to have a good home.

Several people jokingly gave me the phrase, “Home is where the heart is.” I laughed and told them that wasn’t a good enough answer. But the more I thought about it, the more that little saying makes sense. Home for many people is not a happy, loving place. Many are broken and destroyed, both physically and figuratively. So many of us in this country struggle to create that “perfect” home, using material possessions as a means to be happy. All those efforts fail because the only perfect home is the one that Christ has gone ahead to prepare for us. That home is where our hearts need to long to be—home with Jesus. ☺

Marvin Trapnell came to Church of the Sojourners from the Bruderhof, where he grew up. He lived with Sojourners for two years and in the process fell in love with and eventually married Jaime Zazvorka. Since leaving Sojourners, he has been at Christian Encounter Ministries, a residential counseling/discipleship ministry for troubled young people (male and female) ages 16-25 in rural Grass Valley, California. He started as an intern and is now a full-time staff member.

Poetry

On leaving home

Leaving Home

Hannah Zazvorka
Hope Fellowship

Stepping off the cushion which carried you from birth
 diving head first into the deep pool of
 fear
 joy
 adventure
 confusion
 trust
 strangeness... life
 Swimming upstream
 trying to hold onto the memories of your past,
 struggling to return to safety.
 Relax, they say, let the current take you
 and enjoy what lies ahead downstream.
 Yes, there will be boulders and low-hanging branches.
 You will get scraped and bruised, but there will be pools.
 Magnificent deep fresh water pools
 with powerful waterfalls cascading down,
 spraying you softly, reflecting the smile
 spread across your illuminated face.
 Cup yours hands and drink.
 Taste God's goodness and be thankful.
 He is with you, swimming alongside you, down
 the river of life.
 He guides you and protects you in your travels
 carrying your pack when the weight becomes too much
 opening stranger's doors when you are tired and hungry
 painting a breathtaking sunset in the horizon
 and offering a cool breeze after a day of scorching heat
 giving you something to laugh about
 when you thought a moment was at its worst
 teaching you that His love is everywhere,
 whether it be out in the jungles of Panama,
 on the beaches of Belize,
 in the middle of downtown San Jose, Costa Rica,
 or even at the top of a volcano in Nicaragua.
 No matter where your feet take you
 there will be another pair of feet with you guiding your every step—
 Jesus' feet.
 God is good.
 Taste and see.

Kindly But Blindly

Shelly Somers

God is leading me kindly but blindly
 Trying to find a new way to get it together.
 How can you help and make things work?
 Speech is hard when you move away.
 Because who do I want to speak to?
 You lose touch, because you're lonely enough.
 But don't know who to choose to lead you.
 You always have the choice to let
 God lead you kindly, but blindly.

Shelly Somers, now a high school student in San Mateo, California, lived at Sojourners with her father, Chuck Somers, for three years.



© Franck

© Franck

was time to wake up, the effort was worth it after a morning's worth of stacking wood and throwing snowballs and a warm cup of hot cocoa with the mini marshmallows. And it was such a team effort—all the men splitting, women and kids loading into trucks, then driving to such and such a house lining up and passing it piece by piece down some narrow hatchway, sometimes counting it, sometimes naming each piece and sometimes just cracking jokes with whoever stood beside you.

4. *Food is just an excuse to get together.* Come on now—you don't think we went to common meal just for the soup did you? (Although, Margaret, that soup was excellent!)



There are many other rules that probably belong on this list, but as I consider what I love about community, I think the one thing that I could never quite communicate about this community business is that community, for all that it is distinguished by sharing property and finances and endless meetings, really isn't about those things at all! It's really all about the people. What good is "It's time to go home now, Meghan," if you haven't spent a lovely evening together? What good is a practical joke if there's no one to laugh about it with later? Why bother stacking firewood if there's no friend to share the fire with?

As I wandered the world these past months, far from everything I understood as community, I saw it everywhere. Community is just friends caring for each other. Community is not something that we invented or that will die out when we are gone. People will always want to be together and to know each other intimately. People will always want to grow close to God in that way. There will always be people sharing long talks, games of soccer, watermelon, clothes. And for my future, well—I intend to take that secret with me and to bring community wherever I go. It may not be the purest form of community, but there will be food, and what is food but just an excuse to get together? And what is community but just getting together with an excuse? ©

Meghan graduated from Princeton High School in 2002 and then went to New Zealand with Youth With A Mission. Plow Creek is still home for Meghan.

Parents Grow Up Too

Nancy Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

One week after I turned seventeen years old, I left Montevideo, Uruguay for the United States. Another missionary kid and I flew away from the only home we'd ever known. We were following in the steps of many missionary kids before us—you graduate from high school and then you pack your bags for college in the United States. Many years earlier I had acted out this leaving-day with a good Uruguayan friend, each of us decked out in a pair of my mom's high-heeled shoes as we pretended to be going to Baylor (my mom's alma mater). From very young we were prepared for this rite of passage. The preparation, though, accomplished nothing in getting us ready for the trauma we would experience.

Now I'm a mother of two daughters—one about to graduate from Baylor and one about to enter Baylor. Though we had taken each of them to visit other schools away from Waco, they both independently chose to stay in Waco and attend Baylor.

I remember panicking a little a few years before Gabriela, our oldest, started college. How would it be? How could she leave and be far away somewhere? What would become of our family?

As the day came for Gabriela to leave home (5-7 minutes across town), emotion swelled within me. Mixed with sadness at the end of a phase of life was also a lot of joy and gratitude for how God had provided for Gabriela to study. My college years ended up being rich, transforming and deepening years. I wanted Gabriela to have a similar experience.

Perhaps this time of life has been made easier by several smaller leaving-and-coming-back experiences. Gabriela has participated in a Summer Sojourn experience in San Francisco, a semester in Guatemala, and then we left Gabriela home for a summer while we traveled in Central America.

More than a physical geographic leaving, though, I've found the important spiritual work is in relating to each of my daughters in incrementally more adult modes. Learning to entrust them to God's care—easier said than done—has been another piece of the puzzle.

Anali now is months away from leaving. Being the youngest, though, and being the last makes this experience have a different quality. She too has had several experiences of leaving and coming back—Youth Venture in Seattle, SMC youth time in Montana, several trips to Washington D.C., Florida and Utah as part of the National Youth Employment Coalition, just to mention some. I feel blessed by the chance I will have to have Anali close at hand. We should have many opportunities, as with her older sister, of relating to her more and more as an adult.

In the process of helping my daughters grow up, I've grown too. Growth implies change. God has been faithful in all the changes and transitions of my life. So will I shed tears when Anali leaves home? You bet! Yet, there's no sense of panic. I look forward to seeing the ways that God will continue to bring Anali into adulthood. I anticipate that I too will evolve in new ways.

One night, long ago, when putting Gabriela to bed, I found her crying. There was no apparent reason for the tears. When I asked why the tears, she, at ten years of age, said, "I don't want to grow up. I want to always be a kid." Well, Gabriela has grown up and Anali is not far behind. I guess I have grown up, too, and it's not so bad. We are good friends, awaiting all that God might have in store. ©



© Franck

There's Much To Learn in How We Say Goodbye

Lauren Barron
Hope Fellowship

My husband, Dale, has lots of sayings he's known for, some of which I can even repeat. One is: "Your hair is too long if you can't comb it with a washrag" (self-explanatory and comforting for a man who is essentially bald). But there is one in particular I have always liked, not because it is funny, but because it is true: "You can tell more about people by the way they say goodbye than by the way they say hello."

Believe it. Our goodbyes reveal more about our character than our hellos. It's easy to make a good first impression, but it's the leaving that lingers. It's at the end when you'll see what a person is really made of, whether it's as simple as thanking the hostess as you leave the party or a bigger goodbye like moving to a new city. It also applies to how we die and how we behave around others who get sick and old and die.

I have a clear memory from my medical school days in Houston. We are sitting in the auditorium, only a few of us, waiting for a lecture on Alzheimer's dementia. The speaker is a geriatrician, a specialist in the care of the elderly, and he begins by telling how he and his wife care for a dear relative in their own home who cannot feed or clothe herself. She cannot walk or talk or bathe herself. She is in diapers. He tells us how much they treasure this loved one, what delight they take in caring for her, how special she is and what a privilege it is for them to care for her. Then he reveals that this relative is not an elderly parent but their own infant daughter.

I have never forgotten his point about how gladly we care for our babies—how tenderly and lovingly and with what joy and hope. But *the same care* required by our elders, we give grudgingly, with pity or dread and with a sense of futility, tragedy and grief. He challenged us to approach the care of the elderly, whether as physicians or family

members, with more hope, more optimism, more joy and more of a sense of privilege—to say goodbye as well as we say hello.

As a physician, I take care of some very, very sick people, many of them elderly, many from nursing homes. I admit, it is a fearful thing to see a human being shrunken and inert, to look into the eyes of someone who stares through you, vacantly. But it matters how I care for them. It matters how often and how long I visit. It matters how I treat these people as they are leaving life as we know it.

There is hope and help in doing this from a passage in *The Bridge of San Luis Rey* by Thornton Wilder: "Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning."

Even memory is not necessary for love. There is a land of the living and a land of the dead and the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning.

I remember a lady named Ruth I took care of many years ago. She was eighty-two and dying with emphysema. One day on rounds, I found a nurse's aide named Iris at Ruth's bedside, painting her fingernails. She had put lipstick and green eye shadow on Ms. Ruth, perfect shades to complement her red hair, now carefully brushed. She had dressed the patient in a clean, new nightgown—one with little pink roses and a ribbon at the collar. The sheets were smoothed over her tiny body. Iris had Ms. Ruth fixed up so nice, I had to spend extra time examining her just to make sure she was as sick as I believed she was. She was.

Maybe Ruth wasn't aware of any of that. And maybe both Iris and I will be old and forgetful one day and won't remember any of it either. The memory of this parting may be lost, but the love and kindness with which it was done will stand forever, an eternal image of Wilder's words: "the bridge is love, the only survival, the only meaning." ©



Excuses to (Still) Live in Community

Meghan Reha
Plow Creek Fellowship

"So you live in community, eh?" someone asked me one day, as I was trying to relax in the living room in Auckland, New Zealand. I groaned inwardly thinking, "Here we go again." See, I've had this conversation before, and I could never tell anyone what community really was, because really, what is community to me? Every time I try to have this conversation, it gets bogged down somewhere between the legal ramifications of coordinating finances and the truth about Mennonites (no, I don't wear a bonnet!). The frequency of the question has helped me formulate a more concise and interesting answer. Or at least one that I like better. (It's funnier.)

The principles I have gleaned from my vast experience of community are few (and simple if you have enough practice). They even apply in the wild blue yonder.

1. *Just say NO.* A very basic rule to any sort of calm co-existence with anyone else is that you must learn to say no. The trick is to say no in a quietly suggestive manner so that the other party is neither offended nor embarrassed. In fact, the most subtle of all can make it seem like the other person thought of it him or herself, saving everyone that awkward moment. However, when subtly doesn't work, Just Say NO. I have Mark and Louise Stahnke to thank for such a lesson—else I might still be at their house playing computer games!

2. *Don't start something you can't finish.* I can't say that I have a lot of personal experience with this one, but I know that giving in community can sometimes get out of hand. I am sure that somewhere in my parent's house is a while elephant "gift" that changed hands regularly and has beached itself in my father's workshop. I also remember my mother telling stories about a round of pranks that ended with someone's underwear in the refrigerator disguised as burritos...

3. *The more people, the more fun.* Like it or not, work projects aren't what they used to be. Despite all my complaining when it

Thomas Merton

My Lord God,
I have no idea where I am going.
I do not see the road ahead of me.
I cannot know for certain where it will end.
Nor do I really know myself,
and the fact that I think that I am following your will
does not mean that I am actually doing so.
But I believe that the desire to please You
does in fact please You.
And I hope that I have that desire in all that I am doing.
I hope that I will never do anything apart from that desire.
And I know that if I do this,
You will lead me by the right road
though I may know nothing about it.
Therefore I will trust You always
though I may seem to be lost
and in the shadow of death.
I will not fear, for You are ever with me,
and You will never leave me to face my perils alone.

Matt Reha

I have been a fish before,
a fast swimmer and an avid toyer with danger;

but up until now i have never
really thought about water

standing on dry ground
can be lonely until
you discover your wings
but even the highest heights,
the most breathtaking views
and the most adrenaline rushing
dives have brought me back,
back to the ocean, fed by the river
filled by the creek that runs by
the pond that i have often called home

as a restless soul i can see myself
reflected
through light on still treetops so early
in the morning that it is still
damp and cold.

Matt left Plow Creek in the spring of 1999, now living in New Orleans and building houses for Habitat for Humanity. A seeker after truth and lover of music, Matt writes, "Sadness to me is one of the truest and most heartfelt beauties that exists on this earth."



Adz Deming

Marcus Rempel
Grain of Wheat

o sophia
soft sophia
your feet still soled with silk

what stones will you tread
what serpents will strike at your heels
before you walk your final mile
with an elder's tired feet

today your skin's fragility
softens me
a moth wing no less delicate
than your sole against my cheek

i can't protect you from your road
from dust and grit and pain
with time your heels will callous
grow tougher from life's chafing

then your toes will grip the earth
with stronger strides
to speed you on your way

I offer scant protection
no compass for your path
save this:

at day's end
take off your shoes
seek holy ground
come home to him
who waits to bathe your feet

I wrote this poem for my daughter on September 14, 2002, a day after she was born...



MARU CHERRY

Church News

News from San Francisco

Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

This has been a difficult season for Church of the Sojourners. We continue to grieve the loss of our beloved Jack. On March 1, after a birthday party for Edith in which we all got on our grubbies and weeded and pruned the garden, we walked up to Bernal Heights, a green hill overlooking the city where Jack often went to pray (and it's not hard to imagine that a good portion of those prayers were on our behalf). We buried his ashes there, in a spot which has a view of all four of our houses. Later that night Edith got a call she had been expecting for some time: her mother had passed away, after a long decline. Edith continues to be an amazing example of gratitude as she clings to God's provision and to being thankful for the years she had with Jack and for her mother's life.

We have been overwhelmed with other goodbyes as well. Though we know that there is a bigger picture of the kingdom of God that calls people out of our little church to go elsewhere, it's still sad when our loved

ones are no longer near enough to touch. Hannah Zazvorka left to move to Waco in January, and we miss her tremendously, though we are happy to know that our loss is Hope Fellowship's gain. The very same week James and Laura Strzelec and not-so-little baby Margot (last report: 4 months old, 20 lbs.!) departed for their new lives in Everett, Washington, where they will begin the process of becoming Catholics. They report good news of being warmly welcomed into their new church and are finding many ways to share fellowship with brothers and sisters there. That very same month, Steve Waye announced his decision to leave Sojourners—a decision he has been wrestling with for a long time. He is currently involved in a local Episcopal church. We had an enthusiastic sendoff March 17 for Steven Braney's year in Guatemala. Conrad and Margaret Yoder have been talking for some time about moving to Ohio, near Conrad's parents and with the intent of being part of his parents' (Mennonite) church, Lafayette Christian Fellowship. They have recently put a timeline to their decision and plan to move sometime in June. And the church has been grappling with trying to discern God's will for Dan and Kelly Zazvorka, who have been sensing God's leading for Dan to return to his original call as a Presbyterian pastor. After much painful soul-searching and prayer, the decision has been reached that he will begin to seek a pastorate. It's been a heart-wrenching process for us all. The two foster children Dan and Kelly had been lovingly caring for,

Mika and Val, were removed at very short notice at the end of February; we miss their sparkling eyes and hope they can thrive in spite of the difficulties which are surely ahead of them.

We are happy to report that there have been some "comings," too, to counterbalance the "goings." IvaJo Otto, Tim Otto's cousin, has been a huge blessing, as her cheerful spirit and eagerness to serve have quickly endeared her to all of us. She is a junior at UC Berkeley and will be with us through December. Tessa Richardson from Wooden Bridge community in Wisconsin is, as of this writing, coming to visit next week with the idea of moving in sometime this summer. David Lottich is on loan to us for awhile from Reba Place Church—his son Matt is on the Stanford basketball team and David is here enthusiastically cheering him on. Matt Toney, one of our two Summer Sojourners from last year, is talking about moving in with us in the fall. There are a couple more interested people we're still in conversation with. "A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap." (Luke 6:38)

In January the SMC gathering was here and it was good to be encouraged by brothers and sisters from the other churches. That gathering was followed by a visitation from Allan and Jeanne Howe, who spent an intense week talking with everyone at Sojourners and trying to get a sense of where we're headed. The Gatlins came at the end of the week, along with local pastor Bob Appleby, and they pooled their wisdom to try to give us some guidance in terms of vision and leadership. These questions are still in discussion, and we are hopefully expectant that the Spirit will move among us when it comes time for affirming new leadership and articulating our vision.

In February Laura Hare and Lizbeth Guatemala went to Hope Fellowship for a visitation there. Lizbeth returned full of excitement for the work God is doing in Waco. In early March we had our annual Covenant Retreat in the redwoods and were refreshed by Paul's passion and hope in the book of Philippians.

Jeff Hare has been blessed with a different job—no longer doing bookkeeping in an advertising firm, he now gets to work in the same non-profit serving mentally ill adults where Dale Gish works.

What else? We're still in the 40-Wave—starting with Doug Selph last July, followed by Kelly Zazvorka, then Debbie Gish, April will bring 40th birthdays to Laura Hare and

Conquerors and More than Conquerors

An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

We have a president—and perhaps a majority in America—who believe that power may defile other nations, but our superpower status proves that we are favored by God with a calling to conquer evil by means of a war that cannot be evil, because opposing evil makes us good. This is the illusion of American innocence and messianic destiny that is so dangerous to the world. Anti-war demonstrations in Europe, America and around the globe are holding up a mirror to America's face. A moment of disaster or repentance waits.

William Pfaff foresaw this moment in a prophetic warning almost a year ago (*Commonweal*, May 17, 2002). "The final obligation is to comprehend that American nationalism, wedded to American messianism, has currently acquired overpowering force in American life, in that it drives a military program of total military domination everywhere, among allies and neutrals as well as enemies, and a political program of suppressing any resistance to perceived American interest in any matter at all, whatever the cost to allied interests, international community, or international law or precedent. Behind this seems to lie what I would describe as an unarticulated, unintended, yet culpable denial that any sovereign interest exists, beyond American interest—which is an implicit blasphemy."

"I have conquered the world!"

On the way to the Garden of Olives where Jesus faces arrest by his enemies, and desertion from his friends, he says to all generations of disciples, "In the world you face persecution, but take courage, I have conquered the world." (John 16:33)

Anyone who heard these words in the first century would have been reminded of other world conquerors. Alexander the Great

led his victorious armies from Macedon to India, establishing an empire of military dominion that fell apart immediately after his death, but it changed the world of commerce and culture forever after. He conquered the world, and in so doing was himself conquered by evil, sin and death.

Rome, over the course of two centuries, conquered the world from the British Isles to the Middle East, and created an earlier version of globalization for the sake of commerce and the free movement of its armies. Like all conquerors, Rome discovered that the cost of its glory was continual conquest—more death, more sin and more domination.

On this world stage, who is Jesus that he can declare, "In this world you face persecution, but have no fear. I have conquered the world"?

Our calling is to be baptized into the death of Jesus who resurrects us to live with joy beyond the fear of death, bearing a faithful witness, to make socially visible with our own vulnerable flesh the kingdom of God in and for this world.

John answers this question in I John 5:4-5. "For whoever is born of God conquers the world. And this is the victory that conquers the world, our faith. Who is it that conquers the world but the one who believes that Jesus is the Son of God." Many Christians have claimed this truth and this faith, but have reduced the life of suffering love that Jesus lived to mere doctrine rather than live in the pattern of faithfulness that defies the world and its values the way Jesus did. One of the most obvious ways the faith of Jesus gets reduced is in the area of non-violence. The powers of this world control and manipulate the human race into perpetual enmity, through its fear of death. Jesus conquers the world by exposing the lies of the system. With God's help it is possible to love to the end, to overthrow the powers without targeting the people who have been taken captive of the world's lies, people for whom Jesus died.

George Bush and his advisors have a vision—like Alexander the Great or the gun-slingers of the wild west—of conquering the world to make it safe for American interests, ruling with allies or without. Those who know the nature of God's love in Jesus have a different vision of conquering the world by suffering love rather than domination. Our witness to the truth must also unmask the presumptuous system of lies that hold people in bondage by the fear of death.

Our mission is to participate in the life of Jesus, who overcame the fear of death to live a life of self-giving faithfulness to the end. The goal of preserving our own lives behind the shield of our nation's power is idolatry and subject to all kinds of manipulations from the powers, or the superpowers. As we are seeing in these days, it leads to war and more death. Jesus has conquered all the forces that keep us from communion with God and from reconciliation with each other. Paul understood this battle well. "Who can separate us from the love of Christ? Will hardship, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? As it is written, 'For your sake we are being killed all day long; we are accounted as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us."

The world has its conquerors, but we follow the one who makes us is "more than conquerors," who has the power to overcome evil and to reconcile us who were his enemies. Finally, there is no other way to overcome evil but by the goodness of God's love that transforms people and the world. This is the only conquest worthy of a life's devotion.

Leaving home in order to choose a home before going home

This issue of our newsletter features the journey of our young people to that freedom where they can make authentic commitments of their own for community, for a spiritual home that is worthy of a life's dedication. We cannot make this journey for them, but we can be faithful and loving witnesses to the truth of Jesus. Our mission is still to raise children, welcome travelers and to love one another in radical social demonstrations of God's upside-down kingdom. We do this with much failure, but from a home base of community that is unashamed of Jesus and his non-violent struggle for justice in the real world of violence and need. Our love must mirror the love of God who died for us while we were still enemies. As Jesus showed, this Love is the only thing the

> Conquerors cont on p.15



Conrad Yoder

Dan Zazvorka passes a cup of wheat to Matt Creeger, at a time of remembrance for Jack Bernard. Some of his ashes were scattered on a hill in San Francisco, overlooking Sojourners' houses.

News from Evanston and Rogers Park

Joanne and David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

What we ain't got more of than you this winter

Other winters at Reba we hold a lottery where everyone stampedes (well, maybe one person) to sign up for the date when the snow will melt off of the picnic table outside the Fellowship office. This winter there is little snow, no lottery, no frenzy, no nothing. Our winter has distinguished itself with countless forecasts of flurries that never happen—not even enough snow on the ground to vent your anger with a dirty snowball. However, every time the forecast calls for a ten percent chance of flurries, the salt trucks are out spreading en masse, so we have more salt tracked onto our carpets by now than snow on the yard. Cars that were once painted different colors now all sport the same hue of briny crud.

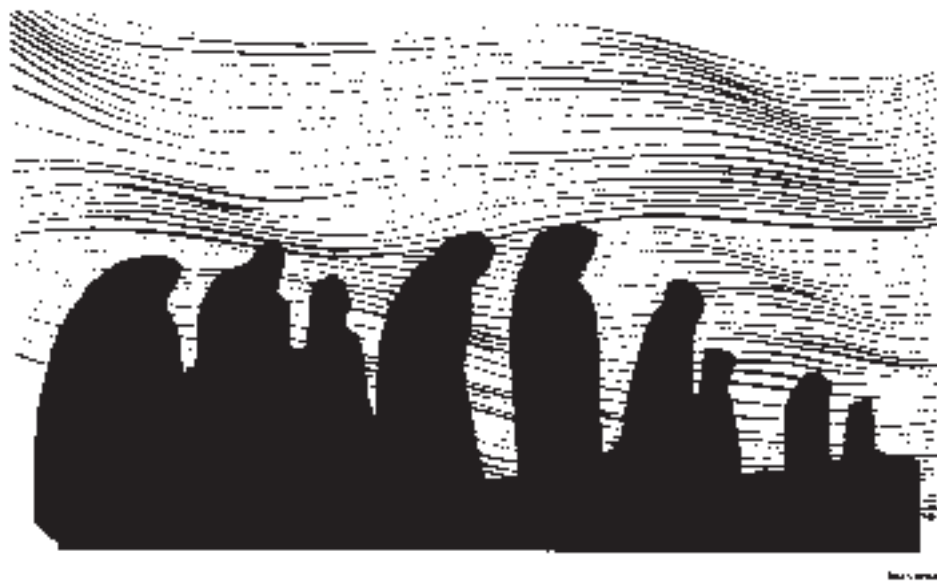
Along with the shortage of snow we're suffering a shortage of things to brag about—like how many SUV's we pushed away from the curb, how much we suffered the wind chill on the El platform, and how many walruses we saw on the Lake Michigan beach. Without shared misery, what can we talk about with our neighbors? Help us with some topics, please. So far we are running neck and neck with Brussels for the most *blab* winter weather on earth.

So, to lift our spirits we have business meetings.

We actually look forward to the worship, teachings and celebrations that have turned our Fellowship meetings into winter highlights. In January we had an inspiring teaching by Greg Clark from the story of the Prodigal Son about how to “ask, give and receive” all we need in the family of God. Then we divided into two teams with the challenge of dressing up Orwin and Sally as bride and groom to help them visualize their roles when they get married on April 5. Was it because of budget shortfalls that we only had newspapers, tape and toilet paper for the dress-up? Or is this research and development for a new line of disposable wedding wear?

Thirty-five years of computers

We recently celebrated thirty-five years of employment by Albert Steiner at the



Northwestern University Computer Center. Albert was a farm boy who loved science and found his niche as an administrator in one of the early computer centers in the country. During his career he was told, and did not believe, that one day there would be desktop computers, that we would carry computers around on our bodies, and that every household would have a computer connected to all the others. More recently he has been told, and does not believe, that computers will travel around inside our bodies. Since they are Albert's favorite snack, we celebrated thirty-five years by feasting on Cheezits, which we believe travel around in our bodies, for a while at least.

At a Monday evening seminar we filled Ziploc baggies of rice to send to our president and favorite congresspersons with the message, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him.”

The biggest cheers at our last Fellowship meeting came from the announcement that Micah Clark's “Poseidon's Chariot” earned an award for Best Design cub scout Pine-wood Derby. Brother Ransom's car, “a silver roadster like in the Monopoly game,” also distinguished itself.

We are grateful for generally good health and for each day we get to serve each other.

Two people claim to be in better condition than before the winter. A knee that “hasn't been working right” for Vicki Caleb since a teenage accident, was replaced on January 15 with a pain-free joint. And on the same day, Joan Vogt had a knee improved in outpatient surgery. Vicki has had meals carried in for several weeks as she recovers, and now is back to work. Vicki and Joan hope to be dancing in the street come spring.

As Linas and Virginia Brown need more help with housekeeping, they have discovered a warm welcome at the Clearing table where they now take their noon meals.

About thirty people had a great time making a line to help Vera Stoehr move across the alley from 705 Reba Place to 710 Monroe. She has been delighted to put her new apartment into an order that is “just beautiful,” to quote a recent visitor.

Five teenagers, Carol Youngquist, Andrea Iverson, Joel Gonzalez, Bethany Cook and Andrew Horst have been meeting with David Janzen, preparing for a trip to our Salvadoran sister community, Valle Nuevo, set for March 15-23. Jim Fitz, from Plow Creek will also participate.

Waging Peace with Iraq

On recent Sundays various collections of members have ventured into the city to participate in anti-war rallies and peace walks. At a Monday evening seminar we filled Ziploc baggies of rice to send to our president and favorite congresspersons with the message, “If your enemy is hungry, feed him.” Greg Clark is a faculty sponsor to a student peace group organizing at North Park College. We also pray a lot for “no war.”

Steve Waye (and a 30th for Jenny Lockie), and in July we'll finish off the 40-Wave with Lily. I think I got everybody.

Though no one from Sojourners went to Valle Nuevo this year, we hold that community in prayer and are glad for our partnership with all of you and with them. As the March 18th anniversary of the crossing of the Rio Lempa passes, we remember their suffering and their faith and we lift our prayers for the situation in Iraq.



News from Tiskilwa

Rich Foss
Plow Creek Fellowship

On February 24 Rick Reha did a teaching at Plow Creek on Revelation 1:4: “Grace and peace to you from him who is, and who was, and who is to come, and from the seven angels before his throne...” (italics mine).

Later that afternoon after choir practice, Rick and Lynn walked out of the common building and behold, seven adult eagles sat in the trees between the common building and their house.

Seven angels and seven eagles.

Rick and Lynn cherished the eagles as a reminder of God's love for Rick as he flew the next day to Hebron in Palestine on a Christian Peacemaker Team delegation. Rick will be returning on March 8. Erin Kindy continues to work in the Chicago CPT office while she waits for a visa to enter Colombia. The Colombian government has slowed the visa approval process for CPTers and other human rights observers dramatically, apparently in an effort to hinder their work.

On February 8 our little global village gathered for a special potluck to welcome Neil, Tutuk, Philip and Timothy home

from a two-month trip Tutuk's homeland, Indonesia.

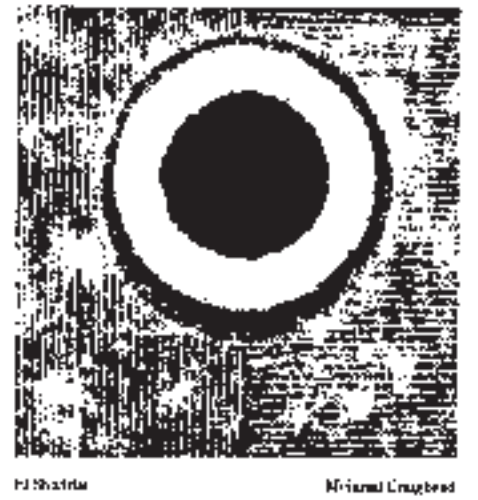
Since December we have been involved in selecting another one or two elders. Lynn Reha has sensed that it's time for her to devote her time to other activities. Stay tuned.

Jim Fitz continues to develop his peace ministry. He and three others from area churches organized a public dialogue on war and peace. The first Sunday thirty people participated and were so enthused that they planned to continue the dialogue the next Sunday.

Tim and Carol Gale, Tutuk Horning, and Dani Dean are all serving on Way of Christ teams in March. The Way of Christ is an Illinois Mennonite and Church of the Brethren version of Cursillo, the Catholic weekend renewal movement.

In the beginning of April William and Kate House, a couple in their twenties, will be moving to Plow Creek. Members of the Fellowship have been praying that the Lord will double our size in the next couple of years with people in their twenties.

Rich Foss has begun recruiting board members to help him create Evergreen Leaders, a nonprofit organization to provide leadership training to working people and their leaders. If you'd like to reserve a court-side seat to watch Evergreen Leaders grow, e-mail Rich at richfoss@plowcreek.org and he'll send you a bi-weekly Evergreen Leaders Update.



News from Waco

James A. Snyder
Hope Fellowship

Our teaching emphasis for December was on our Advent theme of hospitality: looking at hospitality in the nativity accounts, God's hospitality for us and our calling to welcome strangers into our lives.

In January, we started our yearlong theme on humility—humility in our walk in discipleship, humility in acts of service, and humility in our relationships with each other.

Also in January we discontinued our small discipleship groups. Now we all meet on Wednesday nights after a common meal where we spend discipleship time together doing a variety of things, including watching an educational video, Bible study, sharing experiences and communion. We are currently studying Philippians in our midweek meetings.

We welcomed Hannah Zazvorka to Waco from our sister church in San Francisco. She is living with the Gatlin family. Also in January, Carlos Hinojosa moved in with the Phillip and Barbara Bridgewater family.

In January J.B. Smith and Norma Gatlin visited Church of the Sojourners for a Shalom Mission Communities gathering. Joe and Nancy Gatlin were part of a visitation team for another visit to Sojourners, and Laura Hare and Lizbeth Guatemala returned the favor by traveling from Sojourners to Hope Fellowship to be a part of a visitation team here.

What Is Home?

Kevin Casey
Church of the Sojourners

There gets a point in most young adults' lives where they feel the need to leave home. There is a saying, "home is where the heart is," but what happens when home no longer is where the heart is? Teenagers begin to feel uncomfortable living with their parents, in their house and under their rules. In fact, some hate it and can't wait to get out. They no longer feel comfortable living at home. Before teenagers even get a chance to move away from home, home already moved away from them. They are not moving away from home—instead I think they are trying to find it once again. *Home is where the heart is* is proof that one's home is not a mere structure for domestic living, but an area where you feel comfortable, and want to be, and it's no longer home when you don't want to be there. So, when we young adults leave what our parents consider as our home, we aren't leaving our homes, we're leaving our parents' home, in search of our own. So many young adults can't wait for the day to move away from their parents. In my situation, my mother and I have moved away on a few occasions from this physical structure known as our home.

When people say "I'm going back home for Christmas" or things of the such I think that they are not really going back "home," but to the place that had been their home for such a long time, perhaps their longest home. They have a new home, but while being away from what used to be their home for so long, they have a sense of missing it. It's a home to visit, but they would never want to live their with their parents again. When I move away, I will miss what is currently my home, and I will come back to San Francisco to visit my "home," because in a sense you can even call San Francisco my "home," whether or not this building I currently live in will be occupied by mother or myself, because of all of the friends I have made and the family I have acquired here.

After further thought, being a part of a community has shown me that I could have this feeling of a home, this feeling of being safe and comfortable, in many places other than my physical home. Going over to the Creegers and Zazvorkas to visit my second and third families gave me a real feeling of love which I hadn't found before from older

people, besides my mother. If you go to the Creegers' living room, you see a picture of me on their wall along the rest of their family. That makes me feel at home. When I had poison oak, Teri helped me put liquids on me to help heal my skin. When I've done things that are considered stupid or where I

If you go to the Creegers' living room, you see a picture of me on their wall along the rest of their family. That makes me feel at home.

just wasn't thinking, Kelly and Dan would point it out to me. Both Mike and Dan have been mentors to me. Apart from the Zazvorkas and the Creegers, many of the other church members have become as a part of my family. People for whom I really care, and who I feel really care for me. When you are around people who are a part of your family, it makes your sense of home more present.



The picture of Kevin at eight years old, in the Creegers' living room.

It's very difficult figuring out where my home is or where it might end up being. Is it the physical building I live in? Is it at my friends house because I feel comfortable there, but nothing there really belongs to me? If I don't like school in San Diego, will San Francisco be my home? If I do like San Diego will that be my home? Will I not find my home until I graduate school and settle down? I feel many of us young adults feel this way, and ask many of these similar questions, when they have thought about it. ☺

Kevin Casey, age 21, has been part of the Church of the Sojourners family for several years. He came through meeting the Zazvorka and Creeger kids in high school, and has made himself an integral part of our lives since then. Kevin has been living in an apartment across town with his mother. He is regularly and enthusiastically a part of worship, meals, retreats, youth projects, dishwashing, and just hanging out. Gifted in friendship, Kevin quickly expanded his original connection to the church through its youth to include friendships with many of the adults. While working near full time at a grocery store near his home, he has been attending City College of San Francisco.

"You show me the path of my life"

Sara Belser
International House of Prayer

I think leaving home is hard because you have to change your entire life on the social, spiritual, and physical levels all at the same time. There always has to be a transitional holding place for your soul in between the old lifestyle and the new. Forming your own value system is not easy for anyone, and it's especially hard for those that come from countercultural communities. It can feel lonely and disorienting as you try to find space to grow as an individual while navigating in an unfamiliar stream of attitudes and actions.

For the most part, it's the parent's job to prepare their children to succeed in the society they belong to. If the parents are swimming against the flow, the children will feel confused when they are eventually thrust into the stream. I felt for a while that I was spinning as I tried to move forward in establishing my lifestyle directions. Good and bad from the community mixed with good and bad from the larger culture grappled in my soul as I struggled with each new opportunity. Even the smallest choice I confronted would meet a battle with hesitations and second thoughts. By raising me in a Christian intentional community, my family gave me both the strength to lead in my own directions of life and the weakness



Sara Belser (top) with Rachel Flecke.

of struggling with daily choices that should come naturally.

One of these daily functions is financial success. As a single person, I could "live as simply as possible" and avoid this arena. But since I have become engaged, I find that living simply is only a principle to help on the way to prosperity. For me, living simply as a lifestyle philosophy has had to change to a philosophy of abundance. Making money and counting pennies is no longer a Fellowship function but a daily source of prayer, stress and family discussion. Simple living is no longer my priority. It has become the means to a dream of no lack.

Mostly, I am grateful for the experience I had in intentional community because it introduced me to the love of God. In a fluid society full of broken relationships and changing values, I am always aware that God, and not people, is my source of security and happiness.

There is another area in which I feel more preparation at home would have caused an easier transition into adulthood. Forming my own social structure has been a new experience. Spending time with others without an agenda is no longer a sporadic event for me but is now a daily experience. Deeply absorbed in one or two relationships, I continually fight a fear that something is not right, that more relationships would mean greater security. What kinds of relationships to feed in what proportions can be an area of confusion instead of an area where I have fun and enjoy life together.

On the positive side, I find that I have been well equipped for loving others. The ability to be open and flexible with others during constant crises brings a rare stability to my relationships. I understand that I am accountable to God with my heart and therefore I can love unconditionally, flowing easily between intimacy and freedom. Though lifestyle issues challenge me, relational issues come naturally. It is exciting to

be a source of strength for others who have never experienced committed relationships with freedom.

Mostly, I am grateful for the experience I had in intentional community because it introduced me to the love of God. In a fluid society full of broken relationships and changing values, I am always aware that God, and not people, is my source of security and happiness. After leaving community behind, I am starting to discover how his love is expressed through people in an unstructured manner. I am refreshed by the spontaneous heart of God that gives generously without being expected to give, and that loves moment by moment. Enormously grateful for past experiences with him, I value as well my present freedom to respond to his love as I choose. I look forward to forming my own Christian community someday when the seeds of the past have matured and my life has become a tree.

"You show me the path of my life. In your presence is fullness of joy..." (Psalm 16: 11) ☺

Sara Belser grew up in Reba Place Fellowship and currently lives in Lockport, Illinois where she is a worship leader in the International House of Prayer. She is twenty-one years old and engaged to marry Joe Tucker this spring.



Shalom Connections