



# A Visit to Grain of Wheat

Allan Howe  
Reba Place Fellowship

Beth Sawatsky was amazed.

"I think that's the first time I ever paid for bread from Tall Grass Prairie. Every other time somebody knew me and said Oh here, just take it."

We were walking back to the car in the Two Forks shopping mall in central Winnipeg. Few people were out on this furiously cold day in early November. Beth had offered to show me the new downtown location of Grain of Wheat's homegrown bakery.

Tall Grass Prairie began as a seed. A few mothers at Grain of Wheat liked to bake bread. They would send the loaves to their friends in the Wolseley community as a love offering. When Grain of Wheat sent out several families to start a rural community dedicated to organic farming in the 1980s, the harvested grain began to be used in more and more experimental loaves of bread back in Wolseley. Three members decided to launch a little neighborhood bakery. They pooled some funds and bought a tiny storefront with a second floor apartment on Westminster street. GoW members staffed a small mill, the ovens and the store.

Somehow the word spread and business grew. In 2002 the developers of the Two Forks mall appealed to Tall Grass Prairie to open an outlet in the center of the new mall, Winnipeg's smaller equivalent of the Navy Pier tourist center on Lake Michigan in Chicago. Apparently they really wanted that organic bread!

As of late 2003 Tall Grass Prairie is employing fifty full- and part-time employ-

ees and running shifts in two locations round the clock! Other employers in the Two Forks mall have been appealing to Tall Grass Prairie to let their employees work there "so they'll learn how to be like your employees." Paul Langel says a lot of prayer and ministry is happening.

Grain of Wheat kept Virgil Vogt and me pretty busy during a quick visit November 7-9. Apart from meals in various homes and three meetings with the leadership team, we talked at length with four "newcomer" couples, most of the "seed group" leaders, almost all of the former GoW leaders, and the elected sages of the Advisory Council, chosen to be a testing circle for the leaders. Saturday evening we joined one of GoW's



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popular parties to hang out with a big cross-section of adults and teens. Sunday we reported back to a large adult Sunday School class. Virgil gave the sermon during worship. Afterward we joined the community-wide potluck.

Virgil and I found the community (founded 1981) to be generally thriving, a welcome turn-around from the difficulties a decade or so ago when neither the rural community nor the attempted church plant in the North End of Winnipeg survived the first years. Now the GoW community in the Wolseley area of Winnipeg faces the challenges of growth and gentrification: younger people are responding to the vision and reality of community but wanting the challenge and affordability of housing in neighboring areas with greater ethnic diversity than Wolseley now provides.

Much of the life at Grain of Wheat is inspiring and thought-provoking. There are six extended family households and perhaps 60% of GoW's 60 adult members have

lived or are living in households. A "pastoral team" of four responds to many situations and reports to the leadership group. GoW's Advisory Council is a creative way to keep seasoned leaders in the action even while putting members of younger generations in the designated central leadership. "Supper clubs" have functioned for years whenever two or more families decided they'd like to share meals together weekly but have responsibilities for them only on their evening. The rules are strict: a one-hour meal together, with only the host(s) doing the preparation and clean-up.

The community has changed traditional small groups into "seed groups" which offer theme-centered study, sharing and prayer, rather like the groups gathered after someone issues a "call" at the Church of the Savior in Washington D.C. Topics range from the two "transforming Bible study" groups to marriage enrichment (two groups), contemplative prayer, "food simplicity" and a support/oversight group for the Wellspring Healthcare Christian clinic. Each group lasts for one year unless members choose to continue. The leadership team approves proposed new groups provided they have at least five members, three of whom are GoW members.

Decision-making at Grain of Wheat has been working well in recent years. Consensus among members is always the goal. If that proves impossible, then the leadership considers the situation and proposes how the decision be handled. Typically there are three stages: ideas about a topic are presented, a proposal is developed, and finally a decision is made. Most folks feel that Marvin Friedman Hamm and Jarem Sawatsky have been doing fine job of chairing discussions with clarity and good spirit. If the leadership team feels stuck on something, they might convene the Advisory Council for further input.

Virgil and I sensed that the issues Grain of Wheat deals with are so similar to those of other residential Christian communities in the Shalom Mission Communities network that we asked GoW to consider participation. There is no common purse, but the church, the bakery and many other forms of Christian sharing reflect a strong common desire to follow Jesus. Discussion surfaced the fact that the distance from Reba or Plow Creek to Winnipeg is about the same as to Waco and obviously less than the distance to San Francisco. Imagine what a big infusion of Tall Grass Prairie bread might do for our diets south of the border! ©

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## Shalom Connections

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# Headlong into the Arms of Jesus

## A Eulogy for the life of Jack Bernard, given December 13, 2002

Tim Otto  
Church of the Sojourners

*It was almost exactly one year ago that our beloved pastor and friend, Jack Bernard, died suddenly and unexpectedly of cancer. The shake-up caused by his death still reverberates in our midst, and we are also learning to practice remembrance and gratitude through all the losses we have experienced.*

Jack was something like the ace of all trades. For his sixtieth birthday we tried to list all of the obsessions he has had. He was a pilot, a racecar driver, a member of the ski patrol, a rock climber, a cyclist, a wild-life painter, a woodworker, a web designer, and a photographer. It was amazing how quickly Jack could master a skill, and how good he became at whatever he attempted. The only thing he may have been bad at was plumbing, but I suspect that that was just propaganda so that he wouldn't have to

do it as much.

When Jack became a Christian, he tried to do his best at that as well. He went to seminary, and became a missionary in Belize. Upon returning to the States, he joined a Christian community, which eventually was called Church of the Sojourners. Shortly after I joined the church, Jack was carving crosses for people to wear around their necks. He was concerned that we understood that following Jesus meant taking up our cross and following Jesus in costly ways.

But acing Christianity was not so easy for Jack. In fact, a serious difficulty kept coming up. We called it Jack's black hole. He had a pit of despair that he would often sit on the edge of, and sometimes would tumble into. Then in October of 1996, Jack had a revelation. Writing about it later he described it like this:

This revelation came precisely at the point of, and in answer to, my despairing of myself. I was on the edge of giving up the faith, not because of disillusionment with God but with myself. I had high aspirations of living a life truly dedicated to God but was continually confronted by evidence that I was not only far from the goal but had not yet started. I would repeatedly set out to be serious about it at last but would quickly stall out due to dark emotions or

› *Headlong* cont on p.14



Jack Bernard

Dan Zazvorka

# The Wise Man of Guachochi

## Kevin Casey's Rite of Passage, August 2003

as told to Zoe Mullery  
Church of the Sojourners

*What is a "Rite of Passage" at Sojourners?*

Well, as I understand it, when the young people of the church come to a certain age, they usually get taken on some kind of a trip—not necessarily to find God, because living in the church they most likely would already have found him. But to use me as an example, they wanted to show me that God was everywhere, not just in this church, not just in San Francisco, but that I could go anywhere in the world and God would be there. I think that's mostly what they want to do for us. I'm not every other youth person who's gone on a rite of passage so each mission I'm sure has been varying.

*Do you want to say a little about who you are and what your relationship is to this church?*

I'm a 21-year-old. I've lived in San Francisco my whole life. I've pretty much just grown up with my mom, no real father figure, an only child, no siblings. I think that plays a big part in who I am. I've been around this church for six years, and have

been a part of it for maybe about four. I got really sick my freshman year in high school, and my teachers wanted me to make up the work and they told me I needed to get someone's phone number—they suggested Jaime's (Zazvorka). Basically that's how I got introduced to the church. Through that connection I became good friends with Jaime, her sister Hannah, Matt and Ian (Creeger). So in the beginning the main reason I came to the church was because of my friends, and that's why I'd say I've really only been a part of the church for about four years. Now it's more about the church, and my high school friends don't necessarily have to be here, and I've formed friendships with everyone else in the church as well.

*So tell me the story of this Rite of Passage.*

About a year and a half before I actually went on it, I was told that Mike (Creeger) and Dan (Zazvorka) wanted to a Rite of Passage with me. I thought that was a good idea and I wanted to do it. I wasn't able to do it that winter because I already had plans to go to Waco, and then it got delayed to summer, but I didn't have my passport, so it got postponed again. Finally it came down to a time when we were all able to do it, last August. In July Mike blindfolded me, brought me into their little living room, and put a map on the dartboard, and I was to throw a dart onto the map, and wherever the dart hit was where we were supposed to go. Of course this whole time I'm blindfolded and don't even know it's a map of Mexico. I throw it and actually hit the map, not in the ocean or the wall

or anything, and the closest place we found from where the dart hit was a little town called Guachochi, in the state of Chihuahua. But I still didn't know where we were going until about a month later, when we were on the airplane. I figured out we were going to Mexico when we got to the airport, because it was a Mexican airline, but Mexico's still a pretty big place.

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**They wanted to show me that God was everywhere, not just in this church, not just in San Francisco, but that I could go anywhere in the world and God would be there.**

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On the airplane they told me we were going to La Paz, and from La Paz I was supposed to get us to Guachochi and then back to the airport, all in six days. This was my first mission. Mike and Dan explained that I was supposed to figure it out pretty much on my own with Dan as my translator and Mike as my financier, and that I could do whatever I needed to get us there, as long as it wasn't too expensive. Honestly I didn't know if I'd be able to get us there and back in such a short amount of time—it was *really* far, a lot of bus hours and train hours and taxi hours and hitchhiking hours away. We pretty much rode on every kind of transportation except live animals.

They had asked me, before we left, to write down five lifelong questions. Most of my questions related to love, fatherhood, family; for example one of my questions was *What is the main thing that makes a good father?* Another was about telling the difference between your conscience and your thoughts, and what God might be telling you to do or asking of you. One of the big ones had to do with love, like how can you tell the difference between friendship love and romantic love, things along that line. Another one was *How do you know when you meet someone if she's the one or not?* I also asked whether you can only be in love just once.

They also gave me some "sub-missions." They still were yet to tell me what my big mission in Guachochi was going to be, about finding and talking to a wise man—I'd find out about that later. The sub-missions that they gave me turned out to be more difficult



Dan Zazvorka (left) and Kevin Casey ride the bus, somewhere in Mexico.



FRITZ EICHENBERG

than they expected. One of them was to help anyone I saw who needed help, whether it was someone trying to push a car, someone who had a little too much to carry, or pretty much anything. What I usually ended up doing was holding the door for people. It was not very obvious when people needed help. Another thing they told me to do was every night I was supposed to find a place for us to stay, perhaps a church that would host us for the night. I was supposed to try twice every night, but that didn't happen even once because we were so short on time, we'd end up showing up in towns at 10 or 11 at night, and there was just no way to start asking around at that time.

The last thing they told me was that I was to give money to anyone who asked for it. So pretty much the whole trip I had my pockets filled with pesos and half-pesos—I gave something like a few pesos to every person who asked. It was kind of strange, because although a lot of people needed money, some felt awkward asking me for it. Dan told me it was probably because of the way my arm looks (I was born with one arm shorter); he told me that sometimes down there when people have a visible disability, they're often the ones who ask for money themselves, so perhaps they thought it wouldn't be right to ask from someone who might be in need as well. One time there was

a group of kids that asked Dan for money, and he said for them to ask me, and when they saw me they didn't want to. Dan told them to go ahead, and I gave them some money. I mostly only gave money away to kids on the trip.

*So how did your journey start, once you got to Mexico?*

Our first bit of fun was the first night in La Paz. We knew the Gulf of California was right next to us, and after we asked the clerk at the hotel if it was safe to go in the gulf, we walked over with our towels and bathing suits. It was 9 or 10 at night, still quite hot, and the town is kind of partying. There was no one else swimming, and we got a little worried and wondered why no one else was swimming. But it was great. We played a long time in the water. It was a fun way to start it off.

The next morning I had to ask the people at the hotel in La Paz about the ferry that would take us to Topolobampo. The cheapest one comes early, and we have to take a bus to the ferry station, so we ended up taking the expensive ferry—we almost always ended up taking the expensive one because we were always in a hurry. If we had even two or three more days, we could have done it a little more comfortably, not rushing. But it's okay. We were always rush-

ing, which sometimes caused not that much sleep too...

We got on the ferry and the water was beautiful. I hadn't quite seen water that clear ever before. I was still nervous about being able to make it to our destination in time—I figured I had basically two days to get us to Guachochi, in order to have enough time to make it back in time as well. But at the same time it was a blast—I was definitely enjoying myself. First time in Mexico, on an adventure! Yeah!

We spent the night in Topolobampo. The first time I had a chance to help someone was on the train. I saw a woman struggling to open a door because she had bags in her hands so I opened the door for her. On the train we actually start to meet people. Dan ended up talking with a guy who sat next to him, I want to say his name is Jesus, who gave us our first link to someone in Guachochi, the name of a woman he knows and respects. At some point Dan and Mike tell me that when we get to Guachochi I have to find an old, wise, godly, married man to talk to. I keep expecting that Dan and Mike are going to be the ones answering my five questions that I brought—I don't know until we get to Guachochi that it will be that man.

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**She couldn't think of one man who fit the criteria: wise, married, old, Christian. She'd ask things like, "Does it have to be a man?"**

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We passed a gorgeous place called Divisadero Canyon. The train stopped and let us out for fifteen minutes. This place is beyond words. It's a canyon—it's just so deep, and the color—I can't describe it. A little like the Grand Canyon, except this canyon had a lot of green plant life and trees. It was really beautiful in a dramatic way. Mike got to talking with a German couple, who ended up staying in the same hotel with us in Creel. Mike told them what we were doing, and when we saw them again on our way back through Creel I found out that they had been praying for me. They thought what we were doing was pretty extraordinary.

We had breakfast at the hotel the next

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# Church News

## News from Waco

Barbara Bridgewater  
Hope Fellowship

We are eagerly anticipating everyone coming next October for the 2004 SMC gathering. We've been planning and thinking about housing and it's wonderful imagining everyone being out here.

The World Hunger Farm is going very well with the new director, Neil Rowe-Miller. He and his family are very involved at Hope too, which is very exciting. He'll be at the gathering in October 2004. He's very interested in coming to the conference in Plow Creek in January and meeting everyone.

We welcome Katie Robinson into our midst, born and adopted by John and Lisa Robinson in mid-September. John and Lisa have been considering adoption for the last

several years and have had many disappointments. The birth mom is in Dallas and they have a great relationship with her.

For Advent, we'll be studying *The Many Faces of Christ*. Some examples are the humble face of Christ, the face of Christ as woman, the face of Christ as the oppressed person... We'll be thinking about what the incarnation of Jesus might look like to different cultures, to oppressed folks, etc. and we are looking at different depictions of Jesus from these different cultures and sources.

Over the summer we studied the spiritual disciplines using Richard Foster's *Celebration of Discipline*. The book covers twelve disciplines. We decided to each commit ourselves to one or two disciplines and then meet with accountability partners to work on those. Some of us meet one on one, and some in small groups. It's going very well. One of the disciplines that a lot of us are doing is journaling.

Our children are growing up! We no longer have most of our church under six years old. That's been different for us. Some of the struggles of having lots of infants aren't

## SMC Preview of 2004

### Not Like Other Years

David Janzen  
Reba Place Fellowship

**SMC Leaders Retreat** at Plow Creek Fellowship, January 16-19. OK, perhaps that is like other years.

**The annual SMC delegation to Valle Nuevo**, our sister community in El Salvador, will not take place in mid-March, as in previous years. Rather, we will likely go in July for about nine days. Dates to be announced. If you are interested or wish for more information, contact David Janzen at [dhjanzen2@juno.com](mailto:dhjanzen2@juno.com).

**The annual SMC camp meeting in 2004** will not be at Plow Creek. Instead it will be hosted by Hope Fellowship in Waco, Texas, sometime in October. Why not Waco in the summer? Why ask. Dates to be announced.

**Inter-community visits** will be unannounced. We'll just show up and hope we're welcome. Just kidding. We promise to call ahead. ©



Lisa, Katie and John Robinson

here any more. We continue to strive to find ways to include all of our children and help them grow spiritually as we worship, serve, and meet together.

Gabriela Gatlin is serving for a year at Jubilee Partners in Georgia, working with refugees, and that's been great though hard on the Gatlins having her so far away. She hopes to go with the MCC SALT program in the fall to Honduras, and Hannah Zazvorka plans to do that as well.

Anafi is in her first year at Baylor, doing well. Penny Mullet also started school at Baylor.

The Barrons continue to do a lot with their musical gifts both inside and outside the church.

Cristina Dominguez and her children have temporarily moved in with the Gatlins, and Carlos has moved out of the Bridgewater house.

Luis Matias is trying to finish his dissertation regarding societal, economic and social relationships in the Native cultures of Mexico.

In January we'll have a day-long non-violence training with the Peace Center, targeting high school students and Hispanic churches to draw those who aren't normally peace gathering people.



## News from Evanston and Rogers Park

David Janzen  
Reba Place Fellowship

Reba intern Heather Munn is putting a lot of creative effort into the soon-to-be-unveiled RPF website at [www.rebaplacefellowship.org](http://www.rebaplacefellowship.org). In it we hope to include a virtual tour of the Fellowship buildings and neighborhood, like we often give to visiting col-



James Janzen and Alex Shearer help move the Reba Place Fellowship office.

lege groups. Speaking of which—on Sunday, November 9, about eighteen students from Calvin College got the actual tour and a pizza lunch at Reba. We were especially excited to learn of their community experiences. They have covenanted to live in three intentional Christian community households for a year while serving the poor in various Grand Rapids neighborhoods.

We've had another three-week visit from Wendell and Jane Sprague. Since they retired and left Reba a decade ago, they have returned annually so Wendell can fix our teeth for almost-free, and Jane can visit the Chicago opera. This time Wendell insists he really is retiring, and his basement dental clinic at 712 Monroe, with the chair that goes up and down, has been dismantled. With the Spragues, we've learned to look forward to our visits from the dentist. Alas, that era is over, but not before we had a big party and celebration for all the grace God has shown us through them.

A few of our elders are facing health challenges, especially Albert Steiner, who is gradually recovering from back surgery, hoping to return to work in December.

Chris Evans hopes to return from Pennsylvania and New York by Thanksgiving. She is realizing modest success in her art sales and is preparing for a January exhibition in New York City. Meanwhile, her son Carl is living with the Howes.

Sally Schreiner Youngquist's mother died a few weeks ago, so Sally and Orwin went to Pittsburgh for the funeral. They then flew to Washington state for Orwin's parent's sixtieth anniversary. Bekka Youngquist got married in August, and then broke both

wrists in a soccer accident, just days after she began her career as a high school teacher in Colorado. Fortunately, her husband, Jeff Simmering, was at hand to write down lesson plans so the students could write them on the blackboard for the teacher.

In the last *Shalom Connections* issue, Patty Peebles described weekly prayer vigils for the redemption of a building at 1608 Pratt in Chicago, where a teen was shot a year ago and where repeated gang violence has broken out this summer. Reba Place Fellowship has worked out a contract with the owner to buy that building, with a closing date on January 8, 2004. This purchase plan would make it possible to rent about 60% of the building to Living Water Community church to build out for worship space and for other purposes. We believe God has a plan through this key building to transform the neighborhood. Please pray with us for a successful closing and all that is to follow.

We just completed a Saturday Dover White paint day at 737 Reba Place. Next Saturday, November 22, we plan to carry all the Fellowship office tables, file cabinets, computers, etcetera, across the alley to their new home. Nevin Belser and crew have created office and archive space in the old Emmanuel Cluster room so that the Fellowship bookkeeping business can have more space and a street-side address. The new office will feature a little conference room doubling as a gallery for Fellowship artists.

We've begun to prepare for an Ekklesia Project household at 720 Reba Place, beginning in August, 2004. Publicity for this joint EP and Reba venture invites about seven

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seminarians to live in ecumenical intentional Christian community within the context of the larger Reba “village.” Heather Clark has agreed to be coach/facilitator of this communal-academic experiment.



## News from Tiskilwa

Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen  
Plow Creek Fellowship

Erin Kindy and Jim Fitz finally received their necessary visas for Colombia and flew from Chicago on Monday, October 6 to be part of the Christian Peacemaker Team there. We had received a surprise phone call a few days earlier to join Melissa and Erin for a celebration supper at Coneflower Farm, since Erin had just received the news that day that her visa was granted and that she could come to Chicago to pick it up. Erin waited about a year for that visa. In one email from her, she commented, “Thanks to all of you for continuing to walk this way of waiting with me and for waiting with me in prayer... I was surprised to find that the waiting room outside the Secretary of State’s Index Office (where our documents were certified) made me think of a chapel. A worn, torn carpet and people in silence, stained glass on a door. And all of us waiting on the ‘priests’ behind the tinted glass as they stamped and sealed our papers. The song, ‘They that wait upon the Lord’ came to me. ‘Wait’ is a good word because it can mean two things: ‘wait’ as in, ‘I’m waiting to get my visa’ or ‘wait’ as in, ‘the maids were waiting on the King.’ So, ‘They that wait upon the Lord will renew their strength.’ Those of us caring for the needs of our Lord will be renewed? May it be true for you.”

Trying to make sense of waiting was Erin’s task over a period of time. Now as she and Jim are engaged in the challenges of life in Colombia, may they both find that waiting on and abiding in the Lord and his

presence may strengthen them for the tasks at hand.

Plow Creek Church is engaged in gift discernment as each of us is filling out a worksheet and sharing about our gifts in our sharing groups. It’s clear that God has given each one unique gifts to build up his body. We hope that the process of sharing about gifts can help us to become more aware of areas of service, perhaps can stimulate us to care more concretely for each other, and can even encourage us to take on some mundane tasks that just need to be done. We’ll see what emerges as the Spirit moves among us.

We enjoyed the Lantern Festival on Saturday, October 25 where we worshipped together and then made our way to the meadow with lanterns for antiphonal singing and a celebration of light, taking the place of Halloween. A big bonfire called us to remember the saints, ancient and modern, who have been important to us, and each of us had the opportunity to throw a stick on the fire as we named the saint and told some story about that person.

It was November 10 when Rich Foss drove home a new (to him) van, a Dodge Caravan, that had been remodeled just to fit his needs. And it’s like a dream come true! On two longer trips recently, Rich and Sara had car trouble and needed to wait for car repairs, so it was time to make a change. Sara and Rich went car shopping, and David and Rich had discussions about our finances and how to s-t-r-e-t-c-h our dollars and borrow some money. So Rich has been fitted with a wonderful van that makes getting in much easier and even getting his motorized chair in is a breeze. Rich says that communal *love* has become visible and has taken on the form of a van this time!

Plow Creek Church hosted a little party after Sunday lunch on November 16 for Helena (Graham) and Tom “Tanis” Rafter who have just moved to Princeton. Tanis has a part-time computer job at a low-income clinic that has just moved. Helena and Tanis opened a lot of housewarming gifts and seemed to be blessed by all the love that was to be found inside each one. We wish them God’s blessings on their new adventure as a couple.

On November 15 there was a board meeting for Evergreen Leaders here at Plow Creek. This is a relatively new organization. It has now been incorporated in the State of Illinois. Leaders are defined as people who help a group thrive! So Evergreen Leaders attempts to link ordinary people becoming

leaders and thriving groups. A website is being developed by Andy Fitz here at Plow Creek. We’ll keep you informed when it is up and running. On the board from Plow Creek are Lynn Reha, Leonide Begly, Tutuk Horning, and Andy Fitz. Tutuk Horning has designed the logo for Evergreen Leaders, which features an evergreen tree. The first official training is scheduled for February 20-21, 2004. Rich Foss is the presiding trainer, and he will feature leadership stories on the website when it is operating. Right now the stories are available by E-mail every two weeks. If you want to receive the stories, please be in touch with Rich at RichFoss@plowcreek.org. Pray for the Lord’s rich blessings on Evergreen Leaders.

Tutuk Horning just returned on November 15 from Indonesia. She spent several weeks with her family as her sister Ninik was dying of cancer. She was able to visit with her sister in the hospital before her passing and to be with her siblings and parents in the events surrounding and after her death. She had some anxiety as she left about finding her way through airports by herself to make transfers, but the Lord was gracious and she had no problems with the connections. The very day she arrived home, she managed to fight back the jet lag and make it to the Evergreen Leaders board meeting! We are glad for the Lord’s grace in her travels and glad to see her back.



## News from San Francisco

Zoe Mullery  
Church of the Sojourners

It’s been a very busy autumn at Church of the Sojourners. We recently recognized hospitality as one of the primary “ministries” of our church, and have been studying and meditating on what it means for us. God





Lily Martinez on the now-relocated bench in front of 1127-1129 Florida Street.

responded to us quickly by sending a glorious profusion of guests this fall. The turnover rate for beds has been almost comical at times—Edith calls it “hot-sheeting.” But it’s not hard to discern that each guest or group of guests has been a vehicle of God’s blessing to us in one way or another. For example, an acquaintance of Louise’s who came in an emergency housing situation arrived exactly in time to care for Louise after her major back surgery, and turned out to be a real help. We’ve had a couple of encouraging visits from Church of the Servant King Eugene folks, and also from Mike and Hilda Monk of Portland COSK. And a healthy portion of people’s mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, and friends, as well as former church members, curious-about-community visitors, and those needing somewhere to stay while looking for a place to live in San Francisco.

We are in the process of a six-month review of the new leadership structures we set up last spring. We are also looking at how to address some of the general sense of over-busyness and fatigue many of us are experiencing. Part of it may arise from the fact that we are still running the church in the same way that we did when we were a larger congregation, but now with fewer core members to pull together the details of all the things we do. There is a sense of needing to be more deeply rooted in trusting God rather than ourselves, to learn how to function from a place of refreshment rather than overdrive.

We had an interesting drama with our neighbors over a bench in front of the house, built a few years ago by Tim Lockie and a

few of our youth. Some of our neighbors felt that it was a magnet for a “negative element” in the neighborhood—meaning the guys across the street who would use it for drinking beer, or some of the homeless people who sat there. Six of our homeowners called a special meeting in which they asked us, very respectfully and very emphatically, to remove the bench. We spent the next six weeks discussing it, and whether it would be denying Jesus’ love for the poor to remove it. We flip-flopped and argued both sides and decided firmly that we needed to keep it and then a few days later firmly changed our minds. It was interesting how powerful a symbol the bench became, both to our neighbors and to us—in different ways. Ultimately we decided to honor their request and remove it.

We resurrected the tradition of Celebration of the Faithful which we inherited from Church of the Servant King; we hadn’t done it for awhile. We kicked off with a Faithful Costume Party on Halloween, to which people came dressed as the faithful person of their choice. Throughout the week we had presentations and movies on various faithful people, including a guest presentation by Katrina Jenkins from Eugene on Father Damien of the Lepers in Molokai. It was an encouragement to immerse ourselves in thinking about the cloud of witnesses.

We continue to be grateful for the new ones amongst us and the ways they are sharing our life together.

Edith traveled to York, England and spent a month with her daughter and son-in-law there, returning refreshed and full of

enthusiasm for her life here.

Dale and Debbie Gish continue the process of seeking to adopt a baby. They now have an adoption website—please pass it along to anyone you can think of who might be helpful in this! It’s <http://home.earthlink.net/~daledebgish/index.htm>, and their toll-free phone number is (800) 347-7093.

Leo Hare’s adoption into the Hare family was legal and official as of November 22, which was celebrated with much fanfare, cake and grandmothers. We had a Dedication for him in our worship service.

Louise has been healing from her back surgery far more quickly than the doctors predicted. The big, intimidating-looking brace she was supposed to have to wear until February will be off by Christmas, and generally her recovery has been extraordinary, and her spirit of gratitude contagious.

We’ll have special Thanksgiving household retreats this year, for our “new” households to get some Bonding Time.

Anne-Marie Saxton and Hannah Zazvorka will visit our far-flung member Steven Braney in Guatemala, where he’s spent the last nine months learning Spanish and looking for ways to serve. He returns to us in March.

Please pray for Tim Lockie as he seeks God’s wisdom while on an at-home sabbatical; Dan and Kelly Zazvorka as they continue to seek God’s will for where Dan should serve; several people looking for work; and for Rick DiMicco, away from us for a couple of months. <sup>©</sup>



Leo Hare celebrating the finalization of his adoption by Jeff and Laura.



## Poetry

*Todd Malenke*  
Lafayette Christian Fellowship

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### **We Will Have Babies** (alternate title: **Winter Is Coming**)

Today, November 21  
The air is transparent, disarming,  
And warm, very warm  
I step from my house into her foyer  
(it's a lie whines a voice I cannot hear)

In her courtyard the light is dazzling, bedazzling  
The grass is new grass it's growing as my babies have  
The light exposes the recently naked trees  
They remain unashamed  
The trees speak the truth the dazzling light obscures  
(winter is coming)  
That's a lie I tell myself  
With a voice I cannot hear

I turn instead toward this Spring day with joy and desire  
I embrace her fullness

We will have babies  
They will grow like grass

*Todd is a metalsmith artisan. The youngest of Todd's three children began college this fall.*



# A Casket and a Billfold

*David Gale*  
Plow Creek

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As I stepped out of my pickup truck at an interstate rest stop, there it was on the pavement—a nice billfold. Driver's license, credit cards, a few crisp five-dollar bills. Somebody is going to miss this. I could see who on the driver's license—21-year-old John K. from a small town in Kansas. Now what do I do? The only thing was to bring the billfold along with me, later to attempt to return it to John K.

Soon I was on my way again—into Chicago. My original errand re-occupied my thoughts amidst the busy traffic. I was taking a casket I had made to a Chicago funeral home to pick up the body of Michelle. What would a city funeral director think of a simple home-built casket and our plans to bring her body back to Plow Creek Fellowship for a simple, earthy burial? I felt vulnerable to some unknown criticism from the secret workings of the funeral industry.

Michelle had lived at Plow Creek Fellowship for about three years, coming from Jesus People USA community in Chicago. In the fall of 2001 she had been diagnosed with terminal cancer, with a prognosis of three months to a year for her to live. She accepted that diagnosis as God's plan for her—and over the next few weeks set about making plans that fit that prognosis. One decision she made was to move back to JPUSA where she had many friends, as well as her daughter and grandchildren.

Another decision she made was to plan her own funeral, contacting all her nieces and nephews to be pallbearers. Part of this plan was asking if someone could build a casket for her. I felt that I was the most likely person at PCF to do this, having modest cabinetry skills, access to workshop and tools, and a flexible schedule, where I could plan ahead for the time needed. I was somewhat leery of the project, because I had not found Michelle to be an easy person to relate to. But that shouldn't stop me from accepting her request.

Michelle moved back to JPUSA and I tentatively decided that I would build the casket after the Christmas holidays.

As the new year of 2002 dawned, I

became sick—just a cold—but it hung on for days and progressed into my chest. As breathing became more difficult, Margaret drove me to the emergency room, where I was admitted and spent a few days in the hospital with pneumonia. As I lay in that hospital bed, I wondered: will Michelle die before I get that casket built?

Coming home, I was weak, as one could expect. I hung around the house in the recliner chair for a couple of days. There was plenty to think about. How would I build a casket? How should it look? The basic material would be oak veneer plywood. But it needed to look like furniture, not a box. It should reflect Michelle, a very feminine person, not me, the masculine designer. A casket needed handles—she said there would be eight pall bearers! I looked on the shelves of the local home center and contemplated buying eight large white enameled garage door handles. No, that just didn't seem right.

I went to the shop one morning, fired up the furnace, carried in more firewood, and worked on the casket for an hour—and went home exhausted for the day. After a few days the plans came together—a stock piece of oak baseboard around the base, and a smaller oak molding at the top. I devised a simple way, to me, to make a long handle for each side and short handles for each end from oak boards. Two six-foot pieces of 1x2 with four groups of three blocks between, glued up, run through the thickness planer to even out the glue joints, curve the ends on the band saw, run the router round over bit on all the edges, then split down the middle to make two long handles. The final decision was to use a white stain with a coat of varnish on the entire casket.

I was pleased with the final result. The oak grain showing through the white stain looked very nice—and feminine. We stored the casket in Foss's basement. Boo Graham made a white cloth lining. Michelle was able to see the casket, and gave her approval. Time passed; Michelle outlived medical predictions by many months. Patiently she lived, pleasantly greeting her special guests—until March of 2003.

Rick went with me to Foss's basement—we uncovered the casket and carried it out to my emptied and cleaned pickup truck, as planned. But to my dismay, I saw a change. The varnish coat over the beautiful stain had yellowed. Even some of the yellowing was uneven. What a disappointment! There was no time for any changes. The next morning I set off on the three-hour trip to Chicago.

Here I was, now on the last part of the trip, feeling vulnerable not only to the secret workings of the funeral industry, but also because the casket no longer met my own approval.

All was well at the funeral home. In a chapel Michelle's earthly body was placed in the casket. One of the staff got a screw gun and screwed on the lid—now that's my kind of work! We put the casket back in the truck. I covered the casket with a furniture blanket, closed the door on the topper and started the trip home.

Plenty of time to think as I drove. I need to make an effort to locate John K., the billfold owner—and I decided that the casket would look better just painted white, which I could do that evening, prior to the funeral and burial the next day.

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**Here I was, now on the last part of the trip, feeling vulnerable not only to the secret workings of the funeral industry, but also because the casket no longer met my own approval.**

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I arrived home at 4 o'clock, just in time to try a call to Kansas. Maybe I could get the billfold in the mail that afternoon; surely John would want it soon. But the information operator had no listing for that last name in the small Kansas town. On the spur of the moment I asked for the Chamber of Commerce and was connected to the town clerk's office. "John K.? Yes I know him—he's the mayor's stepson. I'll have his parents give you a call." Twenty minutes later: "I'm John's grandfather—his parents are out of town for the day. Yes, just mail the billfold to me." No, I thought, John is not so far from here—he'd probably prefer to drive here and pick it up.

As this was going on I was also engaged in my main activity of the day—the casket. In trips to the shop and my basement I located a can of off-white semi-gloss paint, a brush and drop cloth. Mixed in was time for a quick supper, maybe even sitting still for a bit. My body called for rest and food, my emotions were in high gear.

Then another phone call—John himself—from Chicago on a cell phone—very grateful that some caring person had found



his billfold. He would be returning from Chicago late in the evening. I proposed leaving his billfold in our mailbox at the local post office, and leaving the box unlocked, available any time day or night. Then at the post office I discovered that leaving the little box unlocked meant that I could not close the box! I could not take a chance of somebody else noticing the little door ajar. Home again—I wrote a note explaining how to find our house—come anytime—then back to the post office to tape the note to the little box door.

At seven o'clock Rick, Gary, Richard and I carried the casket into the meeting room. I brought in the paint and brush, and explained my disappointment and my plans.

Others thought the casket was fine. Richard got some furniture wax and rubbed over the uneven area. Gratefully I accepted others' opinion that my own critical eye had over-emphasized the flaw of the yellowed varnish. We prepared the room for the next day's funeral.

At ten-thirty that evening, John arrived at our door; Margaret was up, I had gone to bed. "You must be the wife of the saint." John had a real gift to be humorous and serious in one sentence. Just a few sentences on the phone and at our door revealed a person of integrity—just as I was attempting to be. He could accept the return of his lost possession with honest thanks, but without submissive superlatives, and even laugh at himself.

The next day Michelle's natural family, from St. Paul, Chicago and Colorado, gathered with her JPUSA and Plow Creek family for a simple funeral. We lowered her casket into an earthen hole with manila ropes. All children and adults took turns shoveling in the grave, returning Michelle's earthly body—and the casket—to the earth.

That evening I looked again at the note John left at our house, which he had prepared to leave in the post office box along with a little bag of gourmet chocolates: "A million thanks for keeping me assured that, during a trying time for American values, there are still great people to be found..." Little did he know all the story of the day—that his part added to the whole. ©

› **The Wise Man** *cont from p. 5*

morning—it was a very small hotel, with old-fashioned architecture, which I liked—and then grabbed our things and started walking to a point where we were told would be the best point to hitchhike out of there. To get to Guachochi we still had about 150 miles or so to go, and I wanted to hitchhike. It was an intersection of roads and there was a family waiting on the side of the road hitchhiking too, in the same direction we were. We were all waiting and we ended up playing this rock-throwing game: we would station a bottle on a big rock about ten or fifteen feet away, and the object was to knock over the bottle with a smaller rock. These two little boys were playing with me, Mike and Dan. This one boy was amazing. He hit it at least every other throw, if not every throw. He'd run up, put the bottle on the rock, run back, throw it, *bing*, run back and put it up again... I was hitting it once every fifteen or twenty throws, Mike maybe every five throws. That kid should be a pitcher for one of our major league baseball teams.

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**It felt really good that we actually *did* it, made it there, found a wise person who we all felt was really the right person.**

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Every time a car comes by we put our arm out and hope someone will pick us up. No one did for a good two hours. Finally a guy came by in a huge truck with a big load of dirt, landfill dirt to fix the road with. We asked the family if they wanted to either come with us or take it instead, but they said they'd wait for the next one. There was one passenger seat and then his bed behind, and we rotated who was in the passenger seat. I slept a lot. Mike and Dan had a good time with him. He knew every inch of the road, and he drove *so* slow, the road was really windy, and he would point out the landscape, like "Hey, watch up here, you'll see a rock that looks like a monkey," or "Look at that one, that rock looks like a snake." We were going *really* slow. On the way back the bus we took covered this stretch in about two to three hours, but in four hours with this guy we made it a little over half way. At the point where he decided he couldn't take us any farther, he let us out pretty much in the middle of nowhere in the mountains. He



Mike Creeger

Going slowly up a winding mountain road.

pointed out a home and said there used to be a Christian family that lived there, maybe they still do. So we got off and we saw these two young guys walking up towards us from the house.

It turns out they were both American Mennonites. They explained to us that they try to minister to the Indians who live around there. One of them was from Tennessee. They have church services and they try and get to know the Indians' culture too. We spent only a half hour with them. They offered us some warm food, and probably would have offered us shelter for the night as well, but we were afraid we'd miss the bus, and we needed to get to Guachochi. We were on a time schedule. No time for dilly daddling. They gave us a couple of apples off their tree. They were really friendly. If the mission of my rite of passage was to see that wherever you go, there are godly people, that place really struck me, because it was totally in the middle of nowhere, and they could have been anyone, but they happened to be Christians, Mennonites, and that showed me even more than when we went to Guachochi that God's people are everywhere.

So we take the bus another hour or so and get to Guachochi in the late afternoon. Guachochi is a town of about 10,000. This is when they tell me that this wise man I'm supposed to find is the one I'm going to ask the questions. They told me that we could either use the information they had gotten from Jesus about the woman to find our guy, or we could just start asking around, looking

for a wise man. I said, let's start with this lady, Jesus thought it was a good idea. Maybe it wasn't a coincidence.

So we went to talk to her. She wasn't there when we first got there, but she got back in about an hour. (When someone told us the woman would be back in about an hour, Dan said Oh great... because an hour in Mexico can mean the next day... but she really got back in an hour.)

She couldn't think of one man who fit the criteria: wise, married, old, Christian. She'd ask things like, "Does it have to be a man?" The only person she could think of, even though he wasn't married, was a priest, something like Father Celestino. This was when the goose chase began.

We went across town to his home, and knocked on his gate with a rock. No answer. We asked people if they knew him, and they weren't sure where he was. They sent us across the street to where the bishop lived, who wasn't home either. That's when we went to the church office, and talked to another priest. He said that priest was on vacation, so we asked him if he knew of any old godly wise married men. He thought for awhile, and then directed us to a man named Don Chu who lived by a church, way back on the other side of town where we'd started. Don Chu was described to us as being an old married man who had belonged to the church for many years. He sounded like a winner.

We walked back across town and started asking around for Don Chu by the church.

We saw a restaurant called Don Chu's, so we went in and asked if Don Chu was there, and the man said Yeah, I'm Don Chu. Dan explained that the priest recommended him to talk to us, and explained what we were doing. This Don Chu said, "Well, I have been married for fifty years, but I'm not a man of the church. I don't think you have the right Don Chu." He ended up telling us there were something like eight Don Chu's in that little area. Great.

We walked a little way and asked another person if he knew where a Don Chu lived, and he told us that there's one about a block away, next to a woodshop. In front of the woodshop we asked another guy who said "Yeah, there's a Don Chu in this house right here." I had pretty big doubts that it would be the right Don Chu...

We knocked on the gate and a lady came out. Dan kind of scared her because he stepped inside her gate while he was talking and she tried to shut it on him. But Dan kept talking and she said that Don Chu had just returned from the hospital for surgery on his hand, and he might not want to come out. I was a little disappointed—like what if this is the right guy but we can't talk to him? But Don Chu came to the door, and talked to Dan, who told the story of what we're doing. He asked if it was okay if I asked him some questions to help me in the future. It was kind of funny because Don Chu didn't want to say that he was a wise man. He was saying, "I don't know if I'm the right guy for this but I'll talk to you if you want..." I found that kind of admirable.

He was an old guy who worked in the woodshop. He had just had surgery on his hand for severing some of his fingers. Because of the way his other hand looked, it seemed this had happened before. It was an interesting link because I have an interesting hand as well, a different hand, so there was some kind of connection. While we were talking to him, pretty much every family member who lived in the neighborhood came through. We were probably there for an hour or so, and in that time cousins, nieces, nephews, grandchildren, everyone came by and was friendly. They would take one second and look at us a little strange, and then quickly accept us and be very friendly because we were talking to Don Chu. It's weird; I don't remember really that much what he looked like, except his hands. We didn't take any pictures.

We were invited into the living room and they offered us cookies and drinks. There were four or five chairs and a table. It didn't seem like either poverty or upscale. Dan talked a bit, trying to prepare for our conversation, and then I started asking him some of the questions. He was very willing to answer them; there was no question I asked that he wasn't willing to answer. I think he really liked having us come by; it seemed to boost his spirit. I imagine that someone coming all the way from San Francisco just to see and talk to him, even though we didn't know at the time that it was going to be him, must have made him feel pretty special. It would make me feel pretty special.

It was a little difficult because of the

translation part. Not everything translates, so there were a couple times when Dan would say "I think he's trying to say this..." Some of the answers he gave me I heard differently from what Mike and Dan had heard, when we talked about it later.

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## The role that God has in my life became a little bit bigger—I've often felt that I was just one person, why should this one person matter?

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I'm not going to say everything that he told me, because some of it I want to keep for myself. But I will say a few things. One thing he mentioned several times, when it came to some of my love questions, was the importance of time—that you should always wait and give it time, like whether you love a person or not, distinguishing between friendship and romantic love, waiting to get married—it all takes time, it's important to wait because if you're going to spend the rest of your life with this one person, why not wait a year or two and make sure. Time, waiting, patience—he talked about this a lot.

As far as being a good father, he said that the most important role for a father is to be a good example for your children. "If tree gives good fruit, good tree. If tree gives bad fruit, bad tree." He really emphasized the importance of Genesis, in relation to marriage and fatherhood.

Generally I was very encouraged that he would talk to us, take the time even when he was not feeling well. Some of his responses I found at least very thought-provoking. For example, he said that when you marry someone it's good to have similar backgrounds. I partly believe this is true, and partly I don't. He said if you're a Christian you should marry a Christian, a Catholic you should marry a Catholic—I do agree with that. It took me awhile to agree with it because I always think of circumstances where people change, like you might meet someone who's not a Christian yet; but maybe that's when "time" and "patience" comes into play.

When we left we shook his arm—he presented his hand that had just had surgery and was all wrapped in a bandage so we each shook his arm. As we were walking away, it felt really good that we actually *did* it, made



› *The Wise Man* cont on p.14

► **Headlong** *cont from p.3*

distracted by worldly trivia. I have not been a great sinner struggling with God. I have been a petty one wrapped up in deceptive images of myself. That is just as bad, and I knew it, but I seemed unable to do anything about it for more than a week or two at a time.

But Jack believed that God is *all love*. So the best possible thing we can do is to give ourselves completely to God's will. And because of God's power, what God asks us to do, God will also make possible. Jack's revelation had to do with asking God to make it possible for Jack to give himself completely to God, and relaxing. Jesus had to pull this off, not Jack. Failure was no longer a cause for despair, but an opportunity to remember again that this was something God had to do, not Jack; failure became a reminder to press on with trust and thanksgiving. Jack's revelation had to do with realizing that God's love, and power to transform, applied—even in his case.

I know that I, and many other people have told Jack things that we've revealed to no one else. Because Jack had begun facing himself for who he really was, in the light of God's love and grace, we could tell Jack the truth about ourselves. And just when we were ready to plunge into our own dark pits, Jack would remind us that the gospel, that God's love and power, applied—even in our case.

During this last year, Jack was obsessed with the Jesus he found in the gospel of

Matthew. Jack helped us see a Jesus who is reminding His people that they are in the hands of an all-loving, merciful father. Knowing that, we can trustingly live lives of mercy and self-giving love. This involves letting go of self-protection and the worldly ways of envy, rivalry, and grasping. And it means letting go of our deepest fear: the fear of death.

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**Failure was no longer  
a cause for despair,  
but an opportunity  
to remember again  
that this was some-  
thing God had to do,  
not Jack.**

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How strange that this year was to end with Jack modeling exactly what he had preached in our midst. In the face of death, Jack cheerfully told us that he understood his whole life to be a gift. That God, in his infinite love and goodness, had given Jack exactly the family and church that he needed to grow into the man God wanted him to be. In Jack's words, he had had the perfect family, the perfect wife, the perfect church. And thinking of his golden retriever, Luke, he usually went on to say that he had even had the perfect dog as well.

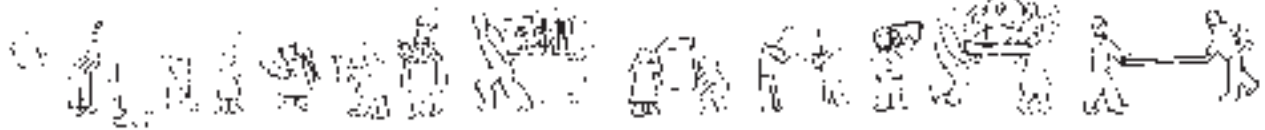
Jack, in his writing and sermons, reminded us that being holy, being a saint, does not mean living without sin. Rather it means being set apart, it means giving one-

self completely to God. And if that is what it means to be a saint, then I suspect that you and I have had the privilege of seeing one in the making.

This is advent season. For some of us this Advent seems especially dark. Why would God take a man who had just turned sixty? Why would God take Edith's husband, and Joanna and Paul's father? Why would God take two pastors of a small, struggling church within a year and a half of each other? Is God good? Is God loving? Is there anything to faith?

If we are truthful we must admit that though we are surrounded by darkness, we have seen a light. We, who live in the shadow of death, have walked with someone who led our feet in the way of peace. What was it like to be around a man who gave himself so wholeheartedly to God? Was it good? It was wonderful! What was the fruit of a man allowing himself to be invaded by Jesus? Did love and grace result? They abounded! Did we see a man alive with the Spirit who healed and restored people? Yes, we not only saw, we experienced it.

Jack's whole life shouts that God is good, God is love, faith matters. Following Jack's example, we have every reason to run headlong into the arms of Jesus. Jack's life points us to hope. Jack's example encourages us to press on in faith. Jack's life gives us ample reason for gratitude. Jack's life points us to another who has come, and is coming. In the words of a sign hung in a children's hospice, where there is plenty of suffering, pain, and death, "Turn out the light. The dawn is coming." ©



► **The Wise Man** *cont from p.13*

it there, found a wise person who we all felt was really the right person. When it came down to the goose chase, I really felt God's presence because he was trying to get us to this right person, starting from Jesus on the train to the woman to the priest who wasn't there to the other person who led us to Don Chu. Sure, one might say that maybe they were coincidences, but I don't think so...

To speed up the story, I'll just say that basically it took us about a day and a half to get us back, as we hit all our connections just right—the bus to the train to the ferry, and we slept on the train and the ferry. We spent the day in La Paz and the next in Los Cabos, relaxing without any rush. I also went para-

sailing and wave-running in Los Cabos.

*Can you say what has stayed with you from this adventure?*

First of all, being able to accomplish the mission that had been given me—that felt really good. It wasn't just me, it was me, Mike, Dan, and God who were all in it. I felt closer to Dan and Mike than I did before. Both of them have been fatherish figures to me, but this trip even more so made me feel like that—that they would take me to another country and try to show me that God is everywhere, that if I open my eyes and look for him I can find him. I really appreciated through a couple talks we had the honesty that came from the two of them,

the troubles they've had, and God's faithfulness to them in that. I think probably their honesty, especially Dan's, did a lot for me, for one showing how honesty can be very helpful, even divulging a lot of hard stuff that he told me shows me the amount that he cares. Mike said a lot too that I appreciated, and I saw how much Mike has been there for Dan while he was struggling, and that affected me too. Not only do I feel more cared for by Dan and Mike, but by my church as well to give me this opportunity. I'm not even sure if I thanked them so... Thank you.

Looking back on it now three months later, the thing that I sometimes refer back to in my mind is what Don Chu said about time, and waiting. I often tend to rush into

## › *The Second Advent* cont from p.1

“Let’s go greet Jeanne and Char in the Reba Services Office. This is where Fellowship members turn in their earnings and, once a month, get their food allowances along with some extra money to give away to any good causes they know about. The common treasury helps us live Jesus’ teaching to love our neighbors as ourselves. We’re glad to offer bookkeeping and administrative services for several non-profit organizations and ministries around here. Neighborhood folks also drop in to use our copier and send faxes if they need to, and then help themselves to pretzels from Jeanne’s jar. Have some.

“Here at 722 Monroe is the Clearing Household with elevators to make it accessible for persons with physical disabilities. The Clearing’s been going like this for thirty years now, with Julius and Peggy Belser leading a dozen folks of all ages in taking care of one another according to each one’s abilities. A lot of students have lived here for a while, getting room and board in exchange for the care they offer. By doing so, some discover that household chores are great training in the skills needed for marriage and raising a family.

“Over there at the end of the block is the House of Peace Co-op. In 1995 that building was a terror to its residents and to the neighborhood, generating more than a hundred 911 calls for police intervention in one year. When drug dealers shot someone in front of the building, the City reacted, offering Reba Development Corporation

enough down-payment money to buy the twelve-unit apartment. They asked, “Can you please do something to turn this place around?” Julius Belser, prophetically, named the newly-acquired building ‘House of Peace.’ Three years later it was totally renovated. The renters progressed through a series of work days and co-op trainings to become owners of their own limited-equity housing co-op. The vision, ‘House of Peace,’ has become a reality.

“Down the street is the Reba Early Learning Center where twelve teachers and fifty children experience the daily love of God...”

And so we walk around the “Reba Village” telling stories. After half an hour some visitors are tired and ready to get back on the bus. Others convey by their looks that we are off-the-deep-end weird, and they would really rather get out of here before something spiritual happens to them too. A few, however, interrupt me with questions and gradually get a picture that excites them with the mind-blowing possibility that people can actually live like this. They exclaim how privileged we must be to live in a place where God is real. And in our visitors’ presence, we who pass too much of our existence looking at our feet in toil and anxiety, discover all over that the Incarnation is now and here. We, too, get excited and want to say, like Jesus to his first recruits, “Hey, come and see!”

The point of this editorial is not that the streets around Reba have some unusual glow that can be found nowhere else. Rather, we believe that the Incarnation keeps happening

in front of eyes that are transformed to see what is already going on, or ready to go on, in your neighborhood too.

There is a place at the center of our being, a point of stillness, that belongs to God. And living out of that center, we are filled with light, able to see the light of God’s presence in the world.

But a Christ-formed community helps in this seeing.

As Reba Church pastor Ric Hudgens keeps saying, community helps us trust and see God more, and trusting God more helps us risk community. God, the individual, and the community all make their contribution to this relationship begun when God came to dwell among us.

Saint Bernard frequently returns to the idea of the “three Advents of Christ,” according to Thomas Merton in *Seasons of Celebration*. The first Advent is the one in which he entered the world, having received human nature in Mary’s womb. The third Advent will bring him into the world at the end of time to judge the living and the dead.

Merton continues, “We learn to recognize the present Advent that is taking place at every moment in our own earthly life as wayfarers. We awaken to the fact that every moment of time is a moment of judgment, that Christ is passing by and that we are judged by our awareness of His passing. If we join Him and travel with Him to the Kingdom, the judgment becomes for us salvation. But if we neglect Him and let Him go by, our neglect is our condemnation! No wonder Saint Bernard would not have us ignorant of the Second Advent.” ©

things—not that I have a girlfriend but I can imagine that I would be the type of person to rush into it. Not only in relationships, but just taking time is a valuable thing. I usually like things to move, I like things to happen, I don’t like them to lag, dilly-daddle... I’ve often had trouble with patience and it was a good reminder to wait. It was helpful. It’s like with school—I don’t think there’s as much of a rush as I thought there was to get it over and done with. Plus, I might end up enjoying it more if I take it slower.

In conclusion, I don’t know... I’m not necessarily a completely changed man because of it, but due to that and other things I’m consistently changing. The role that God has in my life became a little bit

bigger—I’ve often felt that I was just one person, why should this one person matter? But because of God and also Mike and Dan, they showed me that for some reason, I do matter. I’m kind of putting my life in God’s hands, having faith that God would help us get there, that everything would follow through. Now that I think of it, even though it was “my” mission to get us there and back, I feel like my part was miniscule. There’s no way I, alone, would have been able to do it. In the beginning my doubts were very large, I think because I was putting most of the work on me instead of letting myself realize that it was more God that would get us there and back, and not really me. Now I know that it’s really the other way around. ©



# Love Mercy, Now

## An Encouraging Report from CPT Colombia

Jim Fitz  
Plow Creek

Greetings from Barranca, Colombia.

Here are some interesting stories from the recent past. A few months ago a Paramilitary Commander came to our house in Barranca. We were very hesitant to let him in, for we feared he might want to hurt us in some way. However, after some conversation in which he said that he had come to offer us thanks for our work in the Opon, we let him in.

He then proceeded to take over an hour to tell us that our talking to him and his soldiers had convinced them to reconsider their being a part of the Paramilitaries. He and a number of his paramilitary soldiers quit the Paramilitaries several months ago

and have joined a local Protestant church. He remarked that he was glad to replace his guns with his new weapons—a Bible and some books—as a part of his mission for others to seek the way of Jesus. It sounded almost like a direct quote from Ephesians 6. He was very glad for their new life with the Lord, despite the danger they faced of possible threats from the Paramilitaries for leaving them.

He encouraged us to keep up our good work, especially asking the armed groups to lay down their arms and to seek peace by peaceful means. He said the Opon farmers really appreciate our work.

Today in our worship time we were thinking about the newspaper report of another assassination and how, despite the fact that it feels like a broken record, we must not let our selves become numb. We must continue to realize that it is a sad thing still, especially for the families involved. We proceeded to think about and pray for the families involved.

Then our Colombian team member said she has been living with assassinations in the news ever since her birth, and that she felt it good to be part of the CPT Team because it was a reminder that an assassina-



tion is not just a statistic but instead is a very sad human tragedy.

She then went on to share that the first time she encountered a Paramilitary soldier, she asked him what it was like to kill someone the first time. He said it was when he was fifteen. It was so hard he had to close his eyes to pull the trigger. He had killed nine people at the time of their conversation. We then thought and prayed together about what killing people does to the mind, heart, and soul of the people who kill. Please join us in this.

Jim

P.S. A quote adapted from the Talmud has been meaningful to me in the last days: *Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief. Do justice, now. Love mercy, now. You are not obligated to complete the work. Neither are you free to abandon it.* ☺

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