

Shalom Connections

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER OF SHALOM MISSION COMMUNITIES
SHALOMCONNECTIONS.ORG

VOLUME VII

SUMMER 2004

NUMBER 2

The Celebration of Yahweh's Kingship

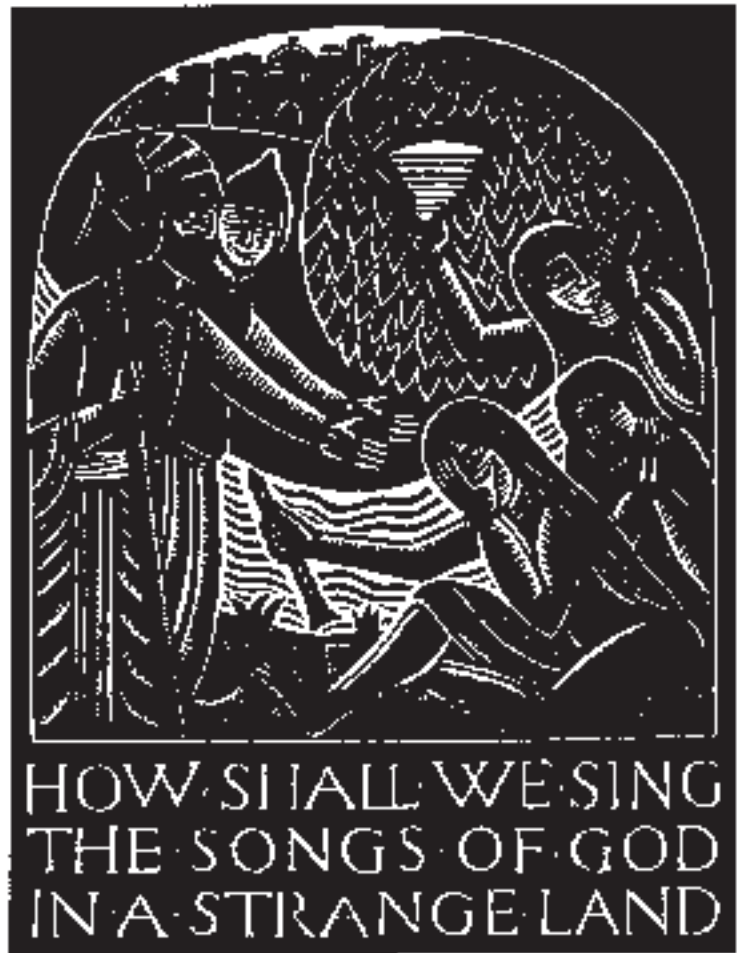
How We Honor the Fourth of July

Debra Gish
Church of the Sojourners

We have an odd tradition at Church of the Sojourners: The Celebration of Yahweh's Kingship. It started about ten years ago at the inspiration of one of our members and is worth some explanation.

After spending most of the 1980s learning about the many sad and shameful things the United States had done in and to other countries over the years, I had become thoroughly disillusioned with my country. So when the idea was proposed of celebrating Yahweh's Kingship instead of America's independence, I was glad. I was ready to make a statement "against" the evils of my country. But this year, especially in the wake of September 11th and the unfaceable sorrow and tragedy enveloping our world, I am longing desperately for something to be *for*. Something worth living and dying *for*.

Both Advent and Lent are times of longing and waiting, one for the birth of the Messiah and one for the Risen Lord. Since September 11th, I feel like I have been in a Lenten longing, a longing and waiting for the Coming Kingdom of God. Hallmark and America's market economy have worked very hard



how shall we

› **The Celebration** cont on p.14

Citizenship

Cliff Kindy
Christian Peacemaker Teams

In both Matthew and Luke, the gospel writers have the devil tempter take Jesus up as part of his testing in the wilderness. From this perspective they can see all the kingdoms of the world. The devil says, in an interesting commentary on political power, that they are his to give to whom he wishes. The tempter offers them to Jesus in exchange for Jesus' worship of him. Jesus withstands the test and the devil departs. Jesus immediately begins his ministry by calling followers to live in the reality of God's reign.

Klaus Wengst, in his book *Pax Romana and the Peace of Jesus Christ*, writes of the varied perspectives of the New Testament writers toward the empire in which they found themselves. He sees Luke as an empire loyalist while Paul takes his stand as a political skeptic. But John, in Revelation, writes "underground literature" for the Christian resistance to empire, according to Wengst.

This year in the United States the cycle of political life moves again to the participatory vote as a pinch of incense that signifies our compliance with the myth of democracy. Voting becomes the visible act of the citizenry. It is an approval of candidates, selected by others, to make the decisions that will impact those in the shadow of the empire.

Jesus displayed the fact that other actions were more in line with God's reign and, at the same time, were found to have a much greater political impact than voting. Holy Week, so called, demonstrates as well as any period the political drama of faithfulness to God. Palm Sunday finds the crowds praising God and laying down cloaks to welcome the entering king, who is established as a threat to Caesar and his representatives. Shortly after, Jesus goes to the economic court of



**The Easter dawn
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the temple to dramatize that his Way is a call that upends the structures of economic injustice. Then, the meal of love and invitation to wash feet is an act contrary to that of empires that aspire to be served by the entire world. That same night, prayer in the garden is submission to God's will, not to a political advocate or self. Finally, the cross on Friday is the ultimate cost of struggle against the devil and his kingdoms. But the Easter dawn reveals the surprise that God acts with us in the struggle and God's is the victory in spite of the alignment of the kingdoms against the Lord and the gathered saints.

Based on the loyalty of Luke and the skepticism of Paul, Christians today might find themselves, with caution, entering the fray of voter politics, but the discipleship ethic ultimately calls us to a deeper, more costly political commitment. A lifestyle that identifies with "the least of these" will be more evangelistic than one that allows an easy fit into the voting public. Refusal to pay the taxes that fund the murderous battles against empire-defined "enemies" is dramatically more political and faithful than a mark on a ballot. Inviting both soldier and terrorist to Jesus' love of enemy, as was Saul on the Damascus Road, is a much grander political act than election politics. Praying in front of a marauding tank or on the tracks before a moving troop train puts feet on prayers that no ballot box can ever find.

Being citizens of God's Kingdom keeps disciples quite busy enough.

Cliff Kindy is a farmer, and has long been active with the Christian Peacemaker Teams. He is currently a part of a permanent team of Christian Peacemakers serving Iraq. ©

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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. Subscriptions are free. The views expressed in this publication do not necessarily reflect the official position of *Shalom Connections*, Shalom Mission Communities, or its member churches. **Postmaster:** send address changes to the Publishing Office address, below. Standard mail postage paid at Coshocton, OH 43812.

MANAGING EDITOR Zoe Mullery
EDITOR David Janzen
PUBLISHER Conrad Yoder
ASSEMBLY Rainwater Family
Linda Yoder
CONTRIBUTING ARTISTS Matthew Creeger
Various from *The Catholic Worker*

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

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

EDITORIAL OFFICE	PUBLISHING OFFICE
2820 22nd St	55488 Township Rd 170
San Francisco, CA 94110	Fresno, OH 43824
(415) 695-8791 voice	(740) 545-2222 voice
(415) 824-8931 fax	(740) 545-5222 fax
zoe@	conrad@yoders.org
churchofthesojourners.org	

Shalom Mission Communities are:

Reba Place Fellowship
PO Box 6575 rebaplacefellowship.org
Evanston, IL 60204 r_p_f@juno.com
(847) 328-6066 voice (847) 328-8431 fax


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

Hope Fellowship
1700 Morrow Ave
Waco, TX 76707
(254) 754-5942 voice
<http://www.mennowdc.org/texaschurches.htm>
<hopefellowship@grandecom.net>

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

SMC Camp Meeting

“One New Humanity,” SMC’s annual camp meeting will be held in Waco, TX, October 8-11, 2004. The SMC communities and friends from Valle Nuevo, El Salvador will be coming together to experience and celebrate the new culture of grace and reconciliation that has been created in God’s people. Youth will have a special program, “A Day on the Other Side,” at Waco’s World Hunger Relief Farm.

Registration forms will be ready in June. Free for SMC members; \$60 for non-members. Call or write Barbara Bridgewater for more information at (254) 759-1649 or bpbridgeh20@hotmail.com. 



“Spiritual authority is not about the power to command. It is about finding a scope and purpose for our lives larger than our individual selves. It is about finding ourselves in living community rather than lonely isolation. It is about living the life God meant for us. This is spiritual authority. And in a world choking on the vain glory of self-worship, worshipping God in Jesus Christ represents our only real chance for a revolution of good.”

—Dale Rosenberger, *Ekklesia Pamphlet #6, Authority, Freedom and the Dreams That We Are Made Of*

Please Not in the Name of Jesus

Joe Gatlin
Hope Fellowship

Last year we dropped our subscription to the newspaper for a few months. There was no matter of principle involved, other than being out of town for a little while, saving a little money, and then just not getting started back.

Two months ago, however, we did re-subscribe. I had forgotten how much fun and amusement the opinion page and the letters to the editor provide. I am quite often surprised at how much Christianity is discussed on these pages. I often wonder if this is the same with other papers in the U.S. I've never taken time to study the matter.

Don't get me wrong. I think it's great. Religion should be open for public discussion. It would be fine by me to see other faiths discussed here. But since I do profess to follow Jesus, I am particularly interested in the multiple letters and opinions on the Christian faith.

What is shocking to me, not just surprising, is how some people who call themselves Christians think it is their responsibility to force their views and values on society. A quarter of a century ago this was primarily an activity of the "liberals." Many activist Christians flocked to the new left and proceeded to find ways to make the gospel support their political ideology.

Today it's a "conservative" phenomenon. In the minds of many Christianity has become equated with a set of conservative political values and agenda. And the conservatives are quick to cry foul when they are attacked for their efforts to make society reflective of their values. "Not fair," they exclaim. "You used to do this. You can't tell us we can't do it now."

Fair's fair, I must admit. But I need to ask, is this approach Christian? Whether conservative or liberal, is it Christian to try to remake society over into our own image using the political process or other means of force or ultimately violence?

I figure if I am going to call myself Christian, then what was good enough for Jesus

and the apostles should be good enough for me. The apostles themselves declared Jesus to be the only foundation upon which to build. One of them, John, wrote to the early Christians that if they claimed to live in Jesus they must then walk as Jesus walked.

Rather than just walking, many conservative Christians are marching forth vigorously in their effort to redeem our country and society. Here are three ways that they seem to be out of step with Jesus.

Take it back.

Constantly I hear the refrain, let's take our country back, let's take the city of Waco back. There are two premises here. First, that we live in an evil and adulterous generation. I agree with that one. Second, at one time things were different; it all belonged to God and was built on Christian values, but someone stole it. Can this be true? Wasn't this land taken from others? Was there ever a time when there were no brothels, no saloons, no violence on the streets, no greed and rampaging materialism, no rebellion against authority? Was there ever a time when society was more characterized by love and harmony between all people rather than segregation, division, and hatred?

Jesus always told his disciples to expect to be a minority, to expect persecution by and rejection from the world... why complain and call it unfair, whether from the left or the right, when that happens?

Jesus never tried to take it back. He knew that it had been bad for a long time. He pointed out a way to his disciples to move forward regardless of the direction that society went.

Take it over and make it right.

Let's get Christians elected to positions of political power so we can get laws passed and institute the right values. It is our responsibility to do so. In its grossest form this conviction, that we have to change the world around us, moves to actions of violence such as the murder of people at the clinic in Pensacola.

One of the most searing images in the Bible is Jesus answering charges before Pilate as he chose the cross rather than the alternative of violence or worldly political power, "My kingdom is not from this world. If my kingdom were from this world, my followers would be fighting to keep me from being handed over to the Jews. But as it is, my kingdom is not from here."

Would modern day Christians have the courage and discipline not to fight, to resist the temptation of taking over the power structures of this world to make it right?

Some may argue that it is different for us. We have a government "by the people," and Jesus never did, so he did not have the opportunity to change things in the same way that we do. This argument represents an outrageous, glaring form of cultural relativism. The apostles continually told the early Christians that the very point at which they were to imitate Jesus was the way of the Cross, his successful resistance to the temptation to take worldly political power.

Get married to it.

Recently I sat in a July 3 worship service at a local church. I was stunned as I watched a military color guard carry rifles and the U.S.



Brian Kinnear

In Nicaragua

Daniel Foxvog
Plow Creek Fellowship



flag down the aisle. I had thought people were coming together to worship Christ. I have a friend in that church who is from another country that spent years under an oppressive military dictatorship (a right-wing one, but it just as well could have been a left-wing one). I knew that the sight of military people with guns brought fear, not comfort, to the average citizens of that country. I wondered how she felt about this display in the church.

And then as people joined in the pledge of allegiance, I watched her in the choir as she had to stand with her lips sealed. It was not her flag. How could she pledge allegiance to it? Christian worship should bring unity to those who share the name, rather than building dividing walls between them.

Jesus always told his disciples to expect to be a minority, to expect persecution by and rejection from the world. The apostles said we should rejoice when we have that opportunity to share with Jesus in his sufferings. So why complain and call it unfair, whether from the left or the right, when that happens?

From the mountain top the kingdoms of this world glitter with great splendor. Why do Christians want that which Jesus rejected? Jesus left three basic gifts with his disciples: faith, hope, and love. These are empowered by the Holy Spirit, not force, violence, or political power. We bring change as we share the good news, as we work, love, and serve, and as we break bread with glad and humble hearts in community with our brothers and sisters. It's not a quick fix. But our faith says that it is the only way to bring about true and lasting change.

The gate is narrow. There are not very many agendas that you can squeeze through it. I'm not saying that any or all of these other agendas are immoral, but please just don't take them up in the name of Jesus. ©

This March I went on a service delegation to Managua with Compas de Nicaragua. I had been invited by my cousin Liana, who helped organize the trip. I had an amazing time in Nicaragua from Sunday the 14th to Monday the 22nd. The trip really broadened my awareness and has deepened my interest in Latin America and service work.

Compas is a U.S./Nicaragua solidarity organization which was formed in 1990. They support several community projects in the impoverished neighborhood of La Primavera, organize several brigades each year from New Hampshire, and work with Mujeres en Acción (Women in Action or WIA). WIA is a group of twenty-five women living in the poorest settlement in La Primavera who have organized to form development programs. They have several nutrition programs—raising chickens, growing vegetable gardens, and using soy to supplement the local diet. They have started a cooperative making and selling traditional gourd art. Compas and WIA have founded a school sponsorship which has paired up eighty-five children and ten women with churches and families in wealthier nations.

We had a wonderful group of twelve people in the brigade. Michael Boudreau, Compas' Field Supervisor, and his wife, Ana Narvaez, acted as our guides and organizers. I

stayed with Ana's sister Tina, her husband Orlando and their children.

Most of the houses were made of concrete with metal roofs, with walls studded with broken glass surrounding the property. The settlement where we worked had sheet metal houses, dirt roads, lots of trash, and dogs, pigs, and chickens wandering around.

We worked with the WIA and their families lifting out the benches and concrete blocks, taking apart the tin roof, pulling down the structure, painting dozens of boards for the new building, and doing childcare.

Our work project was to dismantle the WIA's problematic building in order to reuse its materials, and work on the new one. The WIA recently bought the larger but incomplete building with a sizeable donation they received. We worked with the WIA and their families lifting out the benches and concrete blocks, taking apart the tin roof, pulling down the structure, painting dozens of boards for the new building, and doing childcare. The new building will have three rooms: a children's center for before and after school programs, an activity center, and a

› *In Nicaragua* cont on p. 8



The new WIA building.

Church News

News from Waco

Barbara Bridgewater
Hope Fellowship

We at Hope are looking forward to having EVERYONE come and see us in Waco this fall! The youth have a special opportunity planned for any teens daring enough to make it this far. We are promising Mexican cuisine mixed in with some yummy Texan dishes, too! The best thing is simply the weather: we are still in light summer in October, so bring your shorts and bathing suits (as well as a sweater and some rain gear, just in case). Please keep in your prayers those from Valle Nuevo who would like to come and will need visas.

This summer, two of us are heading to some cool mission assignments: Gabriela will be in Honduras and Hannah Z (whom we claim as well as Sojourners) is heading to Mexico, both for a year. We are all excited! Luis and Ramona Matias Ryan and family will be in Mexico most of the summer. Luis is finishing up his doctoral dissertation this year—we all hope and pray!

Cristina now has a wonderful job as a chef at a day care center. Norma is wanting to study to get her nursing license. Norma is also the director of the Mid-Texas Men-



Some Hope Fellowship members puzzle over clues in a scavenger hunt at an Easter Retreat.

nonite Children's Camp which will happen in June.

The kids are all growing so fast we have to start a youth group (remember when we asked all of you to pray for that eight years ago? God's timing...).

Most of the women of the church recently took a day for a silent retreat and practice in listening to God.

We all seem to be so busy working on our houses, helping each other out as we can. Most of us are immersed some way or

another in Habitat for Humanity and the World Hunger Relief Farm. The Barrons continue to have regular music nights at their house. JB continues to play at every kind of festival and party we manage to hold!

During Lent we studied the Old Testament, following the Israelites through the desert, and were faced with all the violence found in some of those passages. Since then we've been doing some interesting study looking at how Jesus and the apostles used the Old Testament and how to understand those violent passages in the light of Christ. It's been a powerful time of exploration.



News from Evanston and Rogers Park

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

"Give thanks in all circumstances." This is the verse on which our Reba Services office staff reflected on a recent Friday morning, so we tried to give thanks for the news we were aware of.

We rejoiced in the flowering bounty of spring, especially the lilacs and the lush white blossoms of the ornamental pear trees that line Custer Avenue for three blocks.



Ruth Boardman-Alexander teaches the young children at Hope Fellowship.



2011-11-24

Bless the city planner who came up with that idea more than twenty years ago.

Char gives thanks for a bird feeder that Hilda Carper installed years ago outside Char's third-story bedroom window. It has been attracting a wren and other ardent singers.

At a recent Fellowship meeting we reviewed all the blessings God has given through Emmanuel Lodge, an eight-bedroom house on the edge of Camp Lake in Wisconsin. Community members and friends have vacationed and come together here for holidays over the last twenty years. Alas, mold, rot, squirrels, lack of foundation, and the laws of entropy have forced upon us the conclusion that the Lodge should be torn down before it falls down. Does God have resources for us to build a new handicapped-accessible, squirrel-proof, mold-free, Emmanuel Lodge II that is built on a rock? Susan Flecke heads up a committee for prayer and creative planning.

Joey, the Clearing household's four-legged guest-master, died at the age of thirteen years and was buried in the back yard beneath ferns and bloodroot flowers. This elegant Alaskan malamute understood that his job in community was to allow every child and visitor to comb their fingers through his luxurious silver-streaked pelt as he laid down with a contented sigh for his tummy to be stroked as long as anyone felt the need. Julius Belser's funeral text included Genesis 1:26, where God gave dominion to humankind over all the animals of the earth—justifying the final trip to the vet for

this gentle and regal canine whose hind legs could no longer carry him up and down the stairs.

Chris and Carl Evans hosted an open house at their new apartment. Every guest was regaled with loops and loops of beads free from the Mardi Gras parade in New Orleans, where Chris and Carl had to go on recent business—yeah sure. Even the wooden giraffe and the stuffed flamingos wore beads. We snacked on bountiful platters of leftovers from some local clinic's reception. God provides free food and party themes all the time. We listened to Garrison Keillor tell stupid robber jokes while Ransom and Micah Clark counted the beads on each loop until someone taught them how to estimate. With eighty beads on a loop and a dozen loops on each guest, plus a hundred more entangled on the bed, that equals... who cares! Did you hear about the filling station robber whose weapon of choice was a toilet plunger?

Sally Youngquist was the speaker at a recent Illinois Mennonite Women's retreat where she took along Lisa Selph, Chris Churney and Jade for friendship, and Joanne Janzen to play piano for some Reba Songs. They were delighted to meet a few Plow Creek women at the Retreat.

Two Fellowship members, whose names cannot be divulged, have organized a local chapter of Nose-Pickers Anonymous. It's unclear whether the new group's purpose is to cure a bad habit or to provide solidarity in the face of (sic) persecution.

Take-out Sale! Pratt Plaza (the new-used commercial building RPF purchased in Rogers Park) has a grand "take-out" sale. Everyone who volunteers for demolition duty gets to "take out" any item of luggage, of which the last tenant left hundreds. Construction on the

Living Water Community Church meeting space will begin this summer. LWCC is gearing up a fund-raising campaign for its new worship and community outreach center.

Heather Munn has proposed a new curriculum and focus for Reba's intern program beginning in September: "Raising Up Leaders for a New Generation of Christian Community." She and David Janzen are working on it.

Lisa Selph put out a request for a used rug for Bethany's bedroom and ended up with three donations that all find a place in their house. While Allan and Jeanne Howe went to California to visit Allan's mother, Nevin Belser totally renovated a bedroom, just in time for Mark and Judy Howe's visit back home with their two daughters at Easter time. After fifteen years away, Tim and Debby Spacek returned to look for work in Evanston. And as they look, Tim is able to help Reba set up its web site.

"In community we become aware of many people's needs. But the way all those needs and God's resources fit together is a continual miracle," Jeanne Howe observed.

> Church News cont on p.10



pudding eating contest during Plow Creek Harvest Festival.
No hands allowed.

› *In Nicaragua cont from p.5*

community cooperative store. The donations to WIA that came from our delegation's trip fees were enough to buy all the materials needed to complete the new building!

Much of our time was spent going to meetings and tours about development and human rights.

We met with some protesting banana workers who are suffering from the now banned pesticide Nemagon. Over twenty thousand Nicaraguans have suffered cancer, respiratory problems, neurological disorders, sterility, birth defects, liver damage and physical deformities from exposure to Nemagon, and around 850 Nicaraguans have died from it.

One of the issues we focused on was sweatshops. We spoke with union leaders about the general situation, spoke with local sweatshop workers about their experiences, and we visited *una maquila* ourselves. We toured Mil Colores, where 950 workers make jeans and shorts for about \$75 a month. The workers complained of long hours, few facilities, and poor working conditions.

We visited a sewing cooperative with thirty-five worker/owners. They earn an average of \$3.50 a day plus profits, forty percent more than the average *maquila* worker. They work forty hours/week and have a one-hour lunch break. Most importantly, they make

their own decisions, set their own wages and hours, and there is no hierarchy. Quite a contrast to Mil Colores.

We visited the local public health clinic and elementary school. Both were underfunded and under-staffed. While we were in the principal's office, a teacher came in to inform her that they were going on strike that morning because the government refused to increase their salary of \$60 - 100 a month.

One visit was to the CIPRES experimental farm. CIPRES has several agricultural initiatives to provide farmers with livestock and encourage sustainable farming. The farm was less than two acres but it was fascinating. They had various livestock, fish ponds, iguanas, bananas, papayas, cashews, and squash. They had an efficient system to collect the biogas from the animal waste so they could use the methane for fuel.

I am grateful to everyone who helped make the trip possible by helping me prepare for the trip, contributing financially, and praying for me. I am especially grateful to everyone here at Plow Creek for all their support. Photos of my trip and a detailed report are at plowcreek.org/nica.htm.

Daniel Foxvog, age 16, is a homeschooled junior from Plow Creek. He has been involved in social action most of his life. ©

Our Story

The growth of the New Creation Christian Community

Northampton, UK

The New Creation Christian Community represents roughly one-fourth of the membership of the Jesus Fellowship Church.

It's made up of people who have felt God call them to live shared lives, as in the book of Acts. There are marrieds, children, committed celibates, and singles, living in properties ranging from ordinary three-bedroom houses right up to a former hotel with room for sixty people.

We've had to learn many things... how to "take up our cross daily," lay down all that shouts "Me!" and embrace the "Us" of brotherhood in Jesus.

The Community has grown and developed from quite humble origins. The Baptist chapel at Bugbrooke, Northamptonshire, came alive in the charismatic renewal of the early 1970s. From day one, God planted in people's hearts a deep love for one another. We wanted to be together seven days a week! So even on evenings where there wasn't much on, folk would gather in someone's home and spend literally hours sharing their hearts and praising God.

We were quite a mixture, too! Village chapel-goers, Pentecostals, converted drug addicts from Northampton, intellectual seekers from Oxford, and hippies from almost anywhere, found that Jesus broke down dividing walls. As we gave ourselves to this, a love was born, and the foundations of a whole new society were laid. There was a two-way influence: the "straights" parented the "freaks" into a more ordered lifestyle, and the hippies (who were used to communes) convicted the middle-class by their emphasis on simple living and care for one another.

Around 1973, some families took in a single or two and started living in "extended



Daniel with host family (l to r) Orlando, Nadeska, Tina, and Junior.

families.” Someone had the idea of buying food in bulk at the cash and carry, then sharing it around the church, as a way of living more simply and leaving more money for God’s work. There was a notice board in chapel where people could pin notes: “Sheila needs a sofa,” “Fred has time to mow lawns on Fridays,” “Barry has a carpet to give away.” We were starting to share what we had (Hebrews 13:16).

Suddenly Acts 2 and 4 came alive! The first Christians had shared everything in common. The love of Jesus had abolished the social injustice of “haves” and “have-nots.” Here was a new culture, a “city on a hill,” a “Zion of God,” where brotherhood and equality reigned. We were already half-way there, so shared community living was the logical next step. So, as God provided the funds, we bought one or two larger properties, and folk sold up their own homes and moved in.

Houses and businesses

That was 1974, since when we have grown to the point where there are around 80 community houses, large and small, spread over much of the UK. The road hasn’t been easy, but it has certainly been blessed by God. We’ve had to learn many things. How to live at close quarters with all kinds of people, even those you don’t like! How to respond when trials come and love burns low, and how to overcome with faith and devotion. How to arrive at a right “mix” of people. How to manage finances and ensure everything is done fairly. Above all, how to “take up our cross daily,” lay down all that shouts “Me!” and embrace the “Us” of brotherhood in Jesus.

In the early days, as we labored to restore old properties, we realized that working together was a good thing! So the vision was born for several businesses, owned by the church and staffed from the Community, which could provide a service to the neighborhood and bring in an income for the Lord’s work. After all, Paul made tents to finance his ministry. So we founded a building supplies firm, a farm, a health-foods wholesalers, and a painting/decorating/plumbing service, all of which are still trading, with over 200 of our own people employed there.

We soon realized that if we were to continue in existence long-term, we would have to organize ourselves in a way that was recognizable to outside agencies like the taxman! God raised up among us people with the gift of “helps and administrations”

(1 Corinthians 12:28) to guide us through to the structure that we still have today. Jesus Fellowship Community Trust owns the community properties, furniture, equipment and vehicles as well as the House of Goodness Group of businesses. Day-to-day running costs are met from Common Purses at each house. There are separate funds for charitable church activities.

There was a notice board in chapel where people could pin notes: “Sheila needs a sofa,” “Fred has time to mow lawns on Fridays,” “Barry has a carpet to give away.” We were starting to share what we had.

Servant-heartedness

Most of the members of the Community live together in large houses, pooling their goods, income, resources and abilities in God’s service. Others live in their own place but are still part of the common purse of the large house to which they belong.

The New Creation Christian Community is only one part of the Jesus Fellowship

Church as a whole. Many Church members who are not part of the Community also take steps to live more shared and accountable lives, often including the area of their finances. Some try to buy or rent houses in the same street as other families, so they can operate a “neighborhood community” model, with a fair degree of sharing.

The Community members aim to serve the ever-growing and diversifying membership of the Fellowship as a whole. They seek not to be superior or elitist, but rather to add their love, commitment and servant-heartedness to the whole church. They can be counted on to “be there” when needed. Church members also bring life to the Community by keeping its horizons broad and its members rooted in the real world!

Community doesn’t exist for itself. Having premises with space available, and a community team that has learned to love one another, warts and all, means that we can invite people to come and stay a while with us. Our street outreach to the disadvantaged can be backed up by the offer of a time of restoration and growth in a family atmosphere.

Christians searching for a New Testament way of living, and for relationships that go deep, can also come and stay in our houses for some “hands on” experience of faith that works through love (Galatians 5:6).

Taken from http://www.jesus.org.uk/ncccl/about_ourstory.shtml ©



From http://www.jesus.org.uk/ncccl/about_ourstory.shtml

➤ **Church News** cont from p.7

“Without the Lord, there’s no way something like this could still be going after almost fifty years.”



News from Tiskilwa

Richard and Ruth Anne Friesen
Plow Creek Fellowship

Rich and Sarah Foss had the pleasure of vacationing in Florida from April 15-24, visiting with daughter and son-in-law Hannah and Donny. We’re glad they had a good place to visit and rest! Rich has been working very hard at EGL (Evergreen Leaders) workshops



Sarah Foss washes Leonide Begly’s feet during a love feast.

lately and trying to keep his health agreeing to the hard work. Sarah has experienced a lot of stress in her nursing job at Gateway. Please pray for Rich and Sarah’s health in these days.

An interesting conference is happening in Washington, D.C. April 30-May 1. It’s called *The Do-Gooders Exchange: How Can We Do A Better Job?* Rich Foss and Kevin Behrends plan on participating in this conference as delegates from EGL. Their creativity should be tickled in the process. We are rejoicing along with Rich that EGL has been approved for a \$10,000 grant from the Showalter Foundation. Miracles do happen!

Margaret Gale visited with her sister Joanna Lehman in Kansas during Holy Week and Easter. They enjoyed a wonderful time together. Margaret then traveled to Eastern Pennsylvania for a visit with her sister Emily Peachey, who is dying of cancer. May the Lord bless her presence ministry!

We look forward to a quarterly arts show planned for May 7-9 to inspire creativity in all of us. Our announcement sheet is specifically recruiting artwork from the young and young at heart! That perhaps includes all of us...

Our summer Sunday School is being fashioned in a new way this year. We are planning a Two by Two program, where two adults partner with two children for the summer. Each foursome is free to decide how to spend the Sunday School time together. We hope that the Lord will guide us in creative use of the time and in building new and deeper relationships with our children who need our time and attention.

We have had the opportunity of visiting with Cliff and Arlene Kindy early in Holy Week. Cliff had just returned from five months in Iraq with

Christian Peacemaker Teams. He has a gentle spirit that speaks peace. Most sobering is his comment that all parties in Iraq are clear about the urgency of the U.S. handing over sovereignty to Iraqis by the end of June.

Since Jim Fitz’s return from Colombia, he has been working for peace at home. He has made a lot of contacts here and has given nine presentations in the area. The last weekend of April he is on a trip to a family reunion in Pennsylvania. On his way, he has scheduled seven presentations in Indiana, Ohio and Pennsylvania.

Speaking of the Fitz family, there are two up-coming graduations. Emily graduates from Fresno Pacific University the beginning of May. She has been accepted to graduate school at Samuel Merritt College in Oakland, California. She is excited to be enrolled in a physician’s assistant master’s program there. Andy, the youngest, graduates from Princeton High School June 5 and has been accepted to Knox College in Galesburg to work on a secondary education degree. We wish them both well as they transition to new adventures in their education!

The Friesens and Steve Graham are all thinking about different jobs for the fall. Pray for inspiration and good job offers that fill our needs and are in the Lord’s will.

Relating to our theme of Christian citizenship, Ruth Anne and Richard were recently in a meeting of the Peace and Justice Support Network of the Illinois Mennonite Conference. A member of the committee, Cecil Graber mentioned a concern about the possible reinstatement of the draft. He said that positions in draft boards, which have long stood empty, are quietly being filled. Richard went to the Website of the Center on Conscience and War (the former NISBCO) and found a number of the urgent action alerts mentioned by Cecil at the meeting. There is a rumor the administration has been talking to Republicans in Congress regarding the possibility of a draft. Likely the first persons to be drafted would be those with electronic and computer skills needed by the armed forces. However, it is hard to imagine maintaining the present level of involvement in the world when reserves and National Guard troops are reluctant to return for further tours of service. There is a movement afoot in Pennsylvania to automatically register for the draft any youth who apply for a driver’s license or a state ID card. Other states may decide to do the same. The Center for Conscience and War, in conjunction with MCC, the Church of the Brethren, Pax Christi and other religious

organizations, are sponsoring a lobby day on May 14 against the draft. Youth would do well to have their conscientious objection to military service on file with an agency such as MCC prior to the reinstatement of a possible draft.



News from San Francisco

Zoe Mullery
Church of the Sojourners

It's been a somewhat bumpy ride lately at Church of the Sojourners... nothing awful or scandalous, just an ongoing adjustment to the changed and changing nature of our

church and its membership, leadership, and process. By the time this is published, we will have had a weekend with spiritual director Evan Howard to help us in our ongoing need to live into the losses we've experienced and find God in the midst of them. We have also affirmed the necessity of Laura taking a sabbatical from leadership beginning in August, which is long overdue and much needed, though it will have many reverberations as we adjust to her absence in those arenas. We had a visit from Allen Howe and benefited from his years of wisdom and leadership experience. We are in the midst of trying to establish a process for developing leadership and discerning how people's gifts can be well utilized in the church, with Tim Lockie as our guinea pig. We are trying to do right by him. We hope to grow in our ability to build up the body in this way.

We continue to be encouraged by those who've chosen to cast their lot with us more recently. Apart from the wave of new people who mostly showed up last summer, we also have been glad that Katie and Dan Piché have been hanging around. Though only a very few could attend their wedding in Waco over Easter weekend, we had a little reception for them on their return and it's been great getting to know Katie. We've also been blessed by the fact that David Lottich has brought his friend Cheryl into our midst; their use of the Potrero garage as a window-repairing workshop has allowed many of us to get to know her better. David and Cheryl seemed to be the self-appointed gratitude

and appreciation committee in their post there in front of the house, as they had cheerful words for all who entered.

We had a visit from a whole slew of Church of the Servant King in Eugene folks who came down with the single-minded purpose of throwing us a massive barbecue, which they did, and the weather behaved wonderfully—we had exquisite backyard weather with our heaping plates on our laps, followed by a bit of dancing in the garage deejayed by John Stock. Our neighbors across the street who generally hang out in front of their house and listen to loud music while drinking beer kept walking over to peer in the open garage door with mystified expressions at all the adults and kids thrashing around to U2. Laura Hare and Kolbe Logan won the Enthusiastic Boogie prize, in my estimation. With their expertise in books, they also helped us make decisions in our creation of a new and updated Church of the Sojourners library, which will be (we hope) a cozy place to read, drink tea, and “converse.”

Our designated summer ministry project will be to go to help out with the youth summer camp in the mountains organized by Dan and Kelly Zazvorka's church in Lamoille, Nevada. Not only will we get to spend some time with Dan and Kelly and getting to know some of the people in their new church, get to do art projects and sing songs with 3rd - 7th grade kids, but it will be in a canyon of the beautiful Ruby Mountains, which should be a balm to all our urban spirits.

Please pray for Jeff Hare who is scheduled to have some heart-valve surgery sometime this summer.

We're thrilled with the news of a new Lockie baby on the way, due in early December.

Jenny Prosa is here on an extended visit from Forest Grove, Oregon; one of the several ways she's found to serve in her time here is in typing up some of Jack's journals, which are full of his Jesus-centered seeking and which will be a great resource for us all.

Tessa Richardson flew to Wisconsin for her sister's graduation and also to run her first marathon. She placed 2nd among the women, 26th overall (out of 82 total), and completed with a time of 3 hours 58 minutes. Run, Tessa, run!

Our study of 1 John continues and we have been basking in all the images of the Light in a dark world.

We look forward to the October gathering and its communion of the saints. ☪



Dan and Katie Piché tying the knot, April 10, 2004.

The Lord brings the counsels of the nations to nothing; he frustrates the plans of the peoples.
—Psalm 33:10

Our Kingdom Citizenship

An Editorial

David Janzen
Reba Place Fellowship

Who is “we?”

As followers of Jesus living in the United States of America in an election year in a time of war, we can easily get confused about where our citizenship lies.

I had to work hard on that first sentence just to get the pronouns right. Because as I read of suicide bombings with U.S. casualties in Iraq, followed by violent reprisals from Coalition troops in which scores of civilians die, and as I read of calls in Washington for escalating troop levels to stave off defeat a year after President Bush declared victory, my mind leaps to the question, “What should *we* do?”

Who is this “we” that is at war, to which I so quickly link my identity, responsibility and destiny?

Of course we are citizens of the nation where we happen to live, and whatever happens to this nation we will not escape. Where we have the opportunity, we also have a responsibility to bear witness to our government, affirming the good it does while exposing and opposing the evil it purports to do in our name. But our citizenship in the kingdom of God is, thank God, the source of our understanding of good and evil, and not the powers that be.

A list of assorted lies

So to exercise my citizenship, it seems fitting to make a list of assorted lies and assumptions that got “us” into Iraq—an entangling mess of a war which continues to grow in death, destruction, cost and projected duration of occupation:

- The regime of Saddam Hussein is a dire threat to America’s security.
- We have no time for United Nations inspections. We know there are weapons of mass destruction, and they will be found.
- Saddam Hussein and Al Qaida are teaming up to spread terror worldwide.

- The Iraqi masses will welcome the Americans as liberators.

- The U.S. will make it a priority to restore essential services, civil authority, and security.

- Iraqi oil will pay for costs of the war as well as the country’s reconstruction.

- Terrorists will be intimidated by a show of overwhelming force, and desist.

- Democracy and freedom can be created in an alien culture at the point of a gun.

- There is no humiliation in being an occupied country.

- Only the enemy reaps what it sows.

**It is Biblical and
important to call
the nations to
justice and peace.
But in God’s plan
this is the calling
and task of the
church first of all, a
calling to pioneer and
demonstrate the way.**

Congress has held hearings to ask “How could America’s intelligence have been so wrong?” But the hearings only seem to prove that “anyone can make an honest mistake.” And anyway, almost everyone in Congress voted for the war to oust Saddam Hussein, so no one can bring a fundamental critique against it. Rather, the argument between Republicans and Democrats is about how much to beg the U.N. for help a year after the U.S. ran over it with a tank. Being the number one superpower means never having to say you’re sorry. Or even be curious about why they hate us.

“We’ve got tough work there because, you see, there are terrorists there who would rather kill innocent people than allow for the advance of freedom,” President Bush said in a speech in El Dorado, Arkansas. “That’s what you’re seeing going on. Those people hate freedom. We love freedom. And that’s where the clash occurs.” (*Newsviews*, April 7, 2004)

One formula for endless war is to persist in ignoring the enemy’s real motives. Where are the foreign enemies who will agree with Bush’s assessment? Is anyone in Washington capable of stating the actual motivation of America’s antagonists? Does the media even

care? A few journalists do.

Jessica Stern, who has interviewed scores of those our President calls “terrorists,” from Indonesia to Palestine, has this to say: “Individually, the terrorists... cited many reasons for choosing a life of holy war, and I came to despair of identifying a single root cause. But the variable that most frequently came up was not poverty or human rights abuses, as has been posited by the press, but perceived humiliation. Humiliation came up at every echelon of terrorist group members, leaders, and followers... We station troops in restive regions, engendering popular resentment. We demand that other countries adhere to international law, but willfully weaken [international] instruments we perceive as not advancing our needs... The purpose of terrorist violence, according to its advocates, is to restore dignity.” (*Harvard Divinity Bulletin*, Winter/Spring, 2004)

Only a few Muslims have chosen the path of holy war, but the humiliation focused on Palestine is almost universal. The Muslim world from Morocco to the Philippines has experienced the last century as a drama of shame on the world stage in which the “new world order” is only the latest act. This perception of humiliation and longing for restored dignity is a reality dangerous for the West to ignore. Every Western effort to prove its dominance recruits more terrorists and makes more credible the politics of resentment by Muslim fundamentalists.

Prudent politics would involve actually loving our enemies, as Jesus said, by affirming their dignity and humanizing all that is good about their cause. And by admitting our wrongs. But that calls for spiritual leadership and maturity. Unfortunately, the current U.S. administration believes that our good is beyond judgment and the enemy’s evil is beyond salvation. Despite vast differences in resources and casualties, the two sides mirror each other in an inescapable holy war.

I see the Bush crusade to deliver democracy to the Middle East as a diversion from the increasingly unequal political and economic realities at home, where all we can point to is a democracy of the wealthy. Furthermore, in its pre-emptive drive for war in Iraq, the United States has flouted international democracy in the U.N. and the World Court. Finally, the means of delivering “democracy” to Iraq by an elite military force, isolated from the culture and the people, is itself a violent presence and fundamentally undemocratic.

Democracy is a good idea, and the world

needs more of it. Democracy is about hearing all the voices, a fair process, and not being in control of the outcome. At each critical point, beginning with the President's election, the Bush Administration has chosen to take control and impose its will rather than let democracy have its say.

Bush's re-election plan depends on keeping Americans hyped up by two fears: fear of terrorism and of taxes. He has no higher goal to offer than "freedom," that is the freedom to attain personal affluence within a globalized market. There is no idea here of a common good worth sacrificing for. On the day when George W. Bush advocates deep sacrifices for the wealthy in America in order to bring "democracy" to the world, then I will believe he means it. Until then, the war on terrorism looks like pre-emptive imperialism, a means to expand power for the privileged classes while everyone else in America is distracted and manipulated by fear.

The presidential election is shaping up as a referendum on more pre-emptive wars a la George W. Bush, or more wars with multi-lateral forces under United Nations auspices, as John Kerry would prefer. Without enthusiasm, I will probably vote for Kerry in November.

Cornel West has analyzed the resistance of the American political system to any sustained critique capable of fundamental change. "The political predicament of all prophetic practices in the USA has been and remains that of ideological purity and political irrelevance or ideological compromise and political marginality." (Cornel West, "The Prophetic Tradition in Afro-America" from *Prophetic Fragments*.) Were we isolated prophets, the choice between irrelevance and marginality would be utterly disheartening. But we are not alone.

The one choice that matters

"America teaches that the essence of freedom is the unfettered power to choose. The more choices, the more freedom... [But] more important than any choices we have or make is the world-changing reality that God has definitely chosen us through Jesus' birth and life, his death and resurrection.

"True spiritual authority is not coercive, much less violent. Following Jesus is about dying to ourselves that God might rule, rather than killing others to run things ourselves." —Dale Rosenberger, *Authority, Freedom and the Dreams That We Are Made Of* (Ekklesia Pamphlet #6)

The Royal "we"

The Apostle Peter reminds us, "You are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's own people, in order that you may proclaim the mighty acts of Him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. Once you were not a people, but now you are God's people; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy." I Peter 2:9-10

Those who have received God's mercy thereby become a new nation among all the nations of the world, a distinct "ethnos" of Jews and Gentiles together, a new racial group where everything is changed by a reconciled relationship with Jesus. Those of us who have received mercy are included in a "we" that now includes all others for whom Christ died, including George Bush and Osama Bin Laden.

Our capacity to sustain a faithful prophetic witness will depend on how much of life we can share together, since only what is shared can be transformed. A prophetic community must first of all model the justice it proclaims. This is a lesson lived out in a consistent line from prophets' bands in the Old Testament to Christian Peacemaker teams and Catholic Workers communities in our day.

Most of Jesus' commands are to the community of his followers. Paul's letters are addressed to the churches rather than just to individuals. These teachings are meant to shape a people who, in their ethic of life together and their attitude toward enemies

(other rival ethnic groups), give expression to a new peoplehood. By means of this "we" Jesus can disciple us into community, both local and global. It is by belonging to this new nation that we can be for all the nations the way God is for the whole world.

I would maintain that we serve God and country best when our earthly citizenship does not claim our highest loyalty, but rather when it is given to Jesus and his already-coming kingdom. This vantage point allows us to see and critique the deceptive citizenship claims that others presume to make for us. Election day is only one day out of two (or four) years. The other days matter just as much in the letters we write, the vigils we attend, the ministries we serve, the money we refuse to spend, the sins we confess and the lives we live for community.

It is Biblical and important to call the nations to justice and peace. But in God's plan this is the calling and task of the church first of all, a calling to pioneer and demonstrate the way.

"We" actually does most of our thinking

The main insight I have come to in researching and writing this editorial is that an unconscious collective "we" actually does most of our thinking, seeing, and believing for us. Who is the "we" that you are thinking with when you are not thinking about it? Everything depends on whose we are and to whom we belong.

"You are a chosen race."

Thank God.

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› **The Celebration** *cont from p.1*

to make Christmas and Easter their holidays. Success is not yet theirs, but their progress is impressive. We at Church of the Sojourners have decided to claim 4th of July as our new holiday. We have made it a holiday of celebration and of testimony. In this celebration we gather together to testify to the fact that our Lord reigns as King.

On July 4th we acknowledge our longing and celebrate our citizenship. We are citizens of a country without national borders, without language requirements, without ethnic distinction, without a human army to defend it. We are neither Jew nor Greek, slave nor free, male nor female. We are not citizens in a democracy; we are citizens of a theocracy. We have a king, the triune God, and we are His subjects. We are fellow heirs and citizens of the Kingdom of God.

We are citizens of a country without national borders, without language requirements, without ethnic distinction, without a human army to defend it.

This is not a kingdom whose monarch establishes his reign by conquering weaker peoples and imposing his lordship. We have a king who created us from scratch in beauty and wonder and walked among us in the garden. This is a king who in the face of national rebellion by his people, walked in love to the execution chamber on their behalf. This is a king who welcomes new subjects with open arms, arms stretching out wide on the cross of love. His kingdom is celestial and terrestrial. It is both invisible and clearly visible. Jesus, our Lord and King. The Church, His subjects and citizens.

But where's the rub? Why choose the 4th of July to have this celebration?

Because in this kingdom, we are not permitted dual citizenship. By accepting the invitation to nationalize into the kingdom of God, we are renouncing all other loyalties. By choosing this day to celebrate Yahweh's kingship, we are symbolically and concretely declaring our ultimate allegiance. It may appear to be a statement "against" the United States, but in fact it is a statement "for" the Kingdom of God.



"David"
oil on canvas
2004
Christen Mattix

This may be deeply offensive to many, but for some the idea of not pledging our allegiance to the United States is not a difficult call. Nationalism or patriotism may not be the idol we are tempted to bow to, although it has become clear this year that it is a significant idol in the American church. However, this does not mean that we as a Church or we as individuals are free from competing allegiances. Options abound. We are not automatically protected from the lure of competing loyalties. Questioning where our allegiance lies requires us to examine ourselves honestly.

In this kingdom, we are not permitted dual citizenship.

It's a question of how our time is spent. It's a question of where our thoughts are directed. It's a question of where our hearts are moving. To a deaf person who is all eyes observing our actions, where would he say our allegiances lie? To a mind reader listening in on our internal monologue, where would she say our thoughts pay homage? To our King and Lord who walks beside us, where would he say your heart finds its home? This is not a pass/fail test, but questions to help us determine which direction the river of the heart is flowing. The direction and strength of the wind may make it seem like the water is flowing one way, but that may just be a surface illusion. Today's passing distraction or the pressure to conform (whether to good things or bad), may make us float temporarily in one direction or another. The real question is, what is happening below the surface of the water? May God help us remain steadfast in His course.

We at Church of the Sojourners are seeking to move the center our life together towards prayer and hospitality. Prayer as single-minded worship and hospitality as open-handed faith.

Worship: Have you ever really thought about what worship is? Adoration, thanksgiving, prayer. It is all of these things. But in thinking about the 4th of July and the Celebration of Yahweh's Kingship, I realized that worship can also be either a declaration of allegiance or an act of treason.

Why was Jesus crucified? For healing? For feeding the masses? For being an inspirational speaker? No, he claimed to be the king of the Jews. He was perceived as a threat by both the Jewish and the Roman authorities. Although he was not a threat in the same way

they believed him to be, he was a threat none the less. They were right to notice that he was recruiting for the God movement. They were right that allegiances were switching. To follow Jesus in his day was a very dangerous political act. It was clear who they were serving, and it was not Cesar. That is what made it an act of treason. By bowing towards our new Lord and King, we commit treason in the eyes of the principalities and powers.

Bowing is a very foreign concept for us. I can hardly do so in the privacy of my room. Muslims bowing in public and together towards Mecca is a mind-boggling phenomena. It is a nearly impossible concept to grasp as post-modern Westerners. However, recovering the reverence, the awe, the recognition of God as King that bowing symbolizes, is something we must long to understand. Part of what is at the heart of worship is found there. As Jesus was transfigured before his disciples, God made it clear that Jesus is the only one we are to bow to.

Likewise, worship by the gathered people of God is a corporate and public statement of our allegiance to Christ our King. By doing so on July 4th, it is a small but hopefully significant statement that I am a citizen of one country, God's country. And I don't mean America!

Hospitality: In a wild and wonderful way, hospitality is also a loyal act of proud citizenship in Christ's kingdom. Through hospitality we are bearing witness to the nature of our sovereign who welcomes, not excludes, the stranger and foreigner. When he throws a feast, he invites those on the highways and byways. When he forms a

people, he tells them to be a blessing to the nations. This kingdom has the aroma of inclusion, as Jon Stock writes. There are no armed border patrolmen. There are no FBI agents looking for traitors. There are no fighter pilots protecting our freedom in Christ. We will not be asked to take up arms in her defense. This kingdom needs no defending. The battle has been won in sacrifice. We may be asked to give up our lives. Rather, we have been asked to give up our lives. We are free to give freely because we are free to die. In Christ, death no longer has a power over us, so we are free to love our way, not force our way. We are free to keep the door ajar in expectant hospitality and welcome those that God brings our way.

We have a long way to go to become truly worshipful and hospitable citizens of this kingdom. But may we proudly pledge our allegiance to this incomparable King and be grateful to be accepted into his citizenry, with all our cowardice and weakness. All other loyalty options easily pale before this one. It is not a very difficult choice to make, although it will cost us our lives in a thousand little and big ways.

May we as the Body of Christ live and die in celebration of Yahweh's kingship. May we participate as wholehearted, unfettered, fully-equipped citizens in his kingdom. May we bow before him this July 4th and every day in allegiance-defining worship.

This was a sermon given by Debbie in July, 2002. If it feels familiar, it's because you might have seen it on the Ekklesia website. ©





Untitled (self-portrait)
oil on panel
2003
Christen Mattix

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